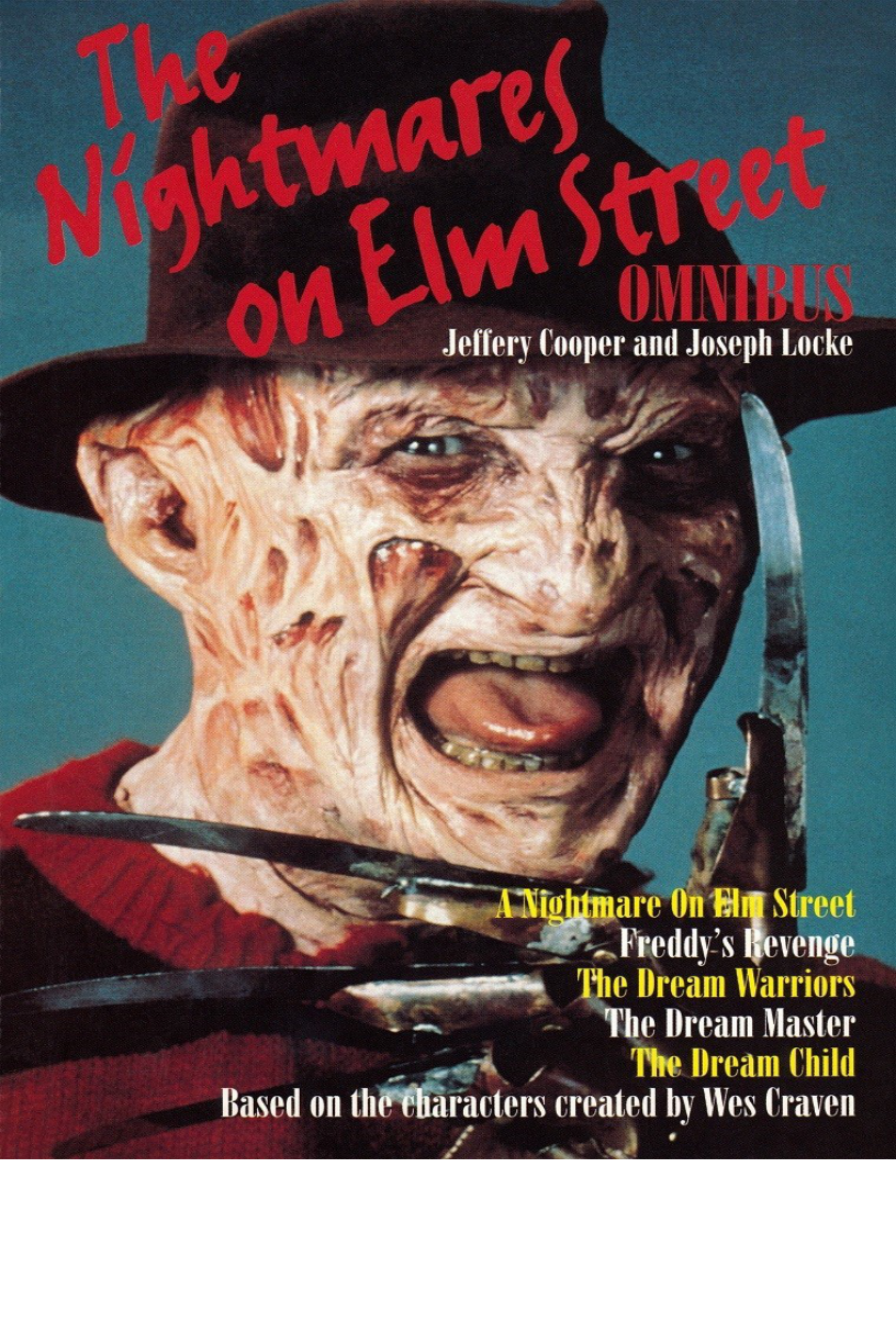

The Nightmares on Elm Street
OMNIBUS
Jeffery Cooper and Joseph Locke
A Nightmare On Elm Street
Freddy's Revenge
The Dream Warriors
The Dream Master
The Dream Child
Based on the characters created by Wes Craven

Freddy's back—
and he's bigger and sharper than ever …

When slasher-killer Freddy Kreuger was burnt alive by the outraged parents of Elm Street, Springfield, they thought he was dead and gone forever …

Only ten years later were people able to sleep peacefully at night, safe and warm in their cosy suburban bedrooms, until a grossly deformed being with razor-edged fingers of death begins to haunt children's hideous nightmares. Freddy is back—now neither man nor beast, but a chilling embodiment of evil itself, as his twisted will and tasteless humour become the children's command, panic, horror and murder stalk the streets of Springfield once more …

For the first time, read the complete blood-curdling story of Freddy's odyssey of terror.

A Nightmare on Elm Street ~ Freddy's Revenge ~ The Dream Warriors ~ The Dream Master ~ The Dream Child

The nightmare is about to begin again …

The Nightmares on Elm Street Omnibus

COMPRISING

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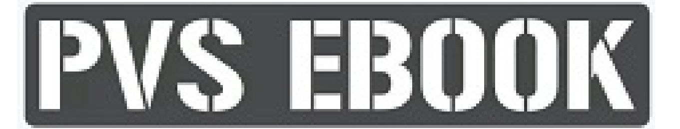
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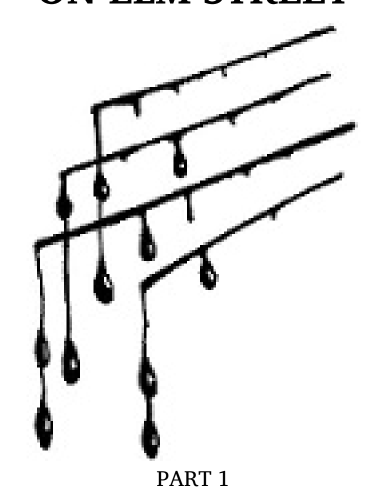
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A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET



PART 1

A novel by Jeffrey Cooper

Based on the screenplay by Wes Craven

NEW LINE CINEMA,

MEDIA HOME ENTERTAINMENT, INC. and

SMART EGG PICTURES Present

A ROBERT SHAYE Production

A WES CRAVEN Film

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

Starring

JOHN SAXON • RONEE BLAKLEY

HEATHER LANGENKAMP • AMANDA WYSS

NICK CORRI • JOHNNY DEPP

And ROBERT ENGLUND as Freddy Krueger

Music by CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Director of Photography JACQUES HAITKIN

Editor RICK SHAINE

Executive Producers STANLEY DUDELSON and JOSEPH WOLF

Co-Producer SARA RISHER

Produced by ROBERT SHAYE

Written and Directed by WES CRAVEN

Prologue

Freddy was dead.

The good people of Elm Street had seen to it that the Springwood Slasher would never bother anyone ever again.

Ten years had come and gone since then, and only now were the good people of Elm Street beginning to sleep peacefully at night, safe and warm in their cozy suburban bedrooms.

Freddy was dead and gone.

But the nightmare was just about to begin …

Chapter 1

Tina woke up screaming, the covers clutched tightly in her trembling hands.

"You all right?" asked her mother from the doorway.

"Sure, Ma," whispered Tina. "It was just a bad dream."

Just a bad dream, she repeated to herself, trying very hard to believe her own words. Tina had not lived fifteen years without suffering an occasional bad dream, but this dream was not like anything she had ever known before.

There was something evil about this dream.

It had started innocently enough. Tina was lost in a vast room full of thick leaky pipes and pounding machinery. It was a boiler room, similar to the one at school—only it was unbelievably large, and Tina was wearing the same thin nightgown she had gone to sleep in. Despite the steam that pervaded the stifling air, she had felt chilled to the bone as she wandered aimlessly through iron doorways and along ramps and down metal ladders that seemed always to lead nowhere.

And she remembered animal noises. A lamb had bleated, and Tina's heart had begun to pound furiously in her chest. What a lamb was doing in the boiler room in the first place and why its bleating should be so terrifying were questions Tina couldn't have answered if her life had depended on it.

And why did she feel that it might?

Then there was the fabric, a dirty piece of cloth hanging in the middle of nowhere. And suddenly it tore open with a terrible ripping noise as four gleaming blades like steel fingers glittered threateningly in the murky darkness. Tina began to run, but she was thoroughly lost and didn't know which way to go. There was a horrible screeching sound as the steel blades scraped against the iron pipes like fingernails on a chalkboard or the high-pitched whine of a dentist's drill as it digs painfully into an exposed nerve. And Tina kept running, knowing that her life depended on escape, but knowing too that ultimately there could be no escape.

And then she stopped to catch her breath and wipe away the sweat that streamed down her face in hot rivulets, and for one sweet moment Tina felt safe. Perhaps, she thought, just perhaps, there might be a way out after all.

And that was when the man with the razor-blade fingers loomed up

behind her, clawing at her nightgown with insane fury as he enfolded her in his deadly arms.

It was Tina's scream that had awoken her and summoned her mother to the bedroom.

"You sure you're all right?" her mother asked again, still leaning up against the doorjamb.

"It was just a dream," repeated Tina.

"It must have been some dream." Mrs. Gray shook her head slowly from side to side as she gazed at her daughter's nightgown.

Tina looked down, suddenly aware of the four long slashes up the middle of her favorite nightgown.

"You better cut your fingernails or stop that kind of dreaming," said her mother. "One or the other." She looked at her daughter one more time and then quietly shut the door behind her.

Instinctively, Tina reached back and removed the crucifix that hung on her bedroom wall. She clutched it to her heart as the old jump-rope song she had sung as a child seemed to chant itself in her brain.

> One, two, Freddie's coming for you.
> Three, four, better lock your door.
> Five, six, grab your crucifix.
> Seven, eight, gonna stay up late.
> Nine, ten, never sleep again!

"That's what it reminded me of," Tina told her best friend, Nancy Thompson, the next morning. "That old jump-rope song. Worst nightmare I ever had."

The girls had just stepped out of Glen Lantz's old red convertible. Glen had already taken Nancy's books as the three young people strode briskly toward the old high school building.

"As a matter of fact," said Nancy, "I had a bad dream last night myself."

Tina was about to ask Nancy about her dream when Rod Lane trotted up from behind and draped his right arm over her shoulders.

"I had a hard-on this morning when I woke up, Tina," he said. "Had your name written all over it."

Tina looked at the boy and shrugged off his arm.

"There's four letters in my name, Rod," she said. "How could there be room on your joint for four letters?"

Nancy and Glen laughed out loud. Despite Tina's flip attitude toward the boy, Nancy knew that her friend really liked him. There always seemed to be an almost tangible sexual tension in the air

whenever Tina and Rod were together, and the fact that Tina's mother couldn't stand the boy only added to his appeal. Rod had never looked like the rest of them, in his heavy boots and his black leather jacket, and he had a vulgar way of expressing himself that Nancy sometimes found a little embarrassing. Still, she knew that he was basically a good person, and she was confident that someday Tina Gray would be known as the girl who finally tamed the infamous Rod Lane.

Rod, on the other hand, would never be known for the brilliance of his repartee.

"Hey!" he yelled as Tina, Nancy, and Glen strode off without him. "Up yours with a twirling lawn mower!"

"Rod says the sweetest things," said Tina as the boy took off across the lawn.

"He's nuts about you," said Nancy, smiling at her friend.

"Yeah, nuts. Anyway, I'm too tired to worry about it. I couldn't get back to sleep at all last night." Tina paused and looked at Nancy. "So what did you dream?"

"Forget it," said Nancy. She felt herself shudder as she recalled the nightmare that had kept her up most of the night. "The point is, everybody has nightmares once in a while. It's no biggie."

"The next time you have one," suggested Glen, "just tell yourself that's all it is, right while you're having it. Once you do that, you wake up right away." He looked at Nancy and shrugged. "At least it works for me."

They had just reached the steps in front of Springwood High when the first bell began to ring. Glen quickly kissed Nancy on the cheek and dashed off to his first class.

"Hey!" yelled Tina as the boy took off, climbing two steps at a time. "Did you have a nightmare too?" But Glen was gone.

Tina turned back to Nancy and sighed deeply.

"Maybe we're going to have an earthquake or something. They say things get really weird before an earthquake."

But there was no earthquake, and Tina was still thinking about her dream when she got home from school that afternoon. It didn't make her feel any better to learn that her mother was going to be spending the next couple of nights out of town with her current boyfriend. The first thing Tina did was invite Nancy Thompson to spend the night at her house. Neither girl objected when Glen decided to tag along.

"I'm glad you could stay over," said Tina when her friends arrived. "When my mom said she was taking off for two days, I almost died!"

"No problem," said Nancy, giving her friend's arm a reassuring squeeze. "Nancy and Glen to the rescue."

The girls settled themselves on the couch, and Glen announced that he had to call home.

“I can’t believe his mother is letting him stay over here,” said Tina.

“Well,” said Nancy with a mischievous smile, “she isn’t exactly.”

The girls watched as Glen inserted a cassette into the oversize tape player he had placed on the table next to the telephone.

“I’ve got this cousin who lives near the airport,” he explained while he waited for his mother to pick up the phone. “So I borrowed this sound-effects tape … Hello, Mom?” He pushed a button on the tape player and the sound of a 747 coming in for a landing suddenly filled the room. “Yeah, I’m out at Barry’s,” he said. He grinned at the girls, and Nancy put a hand over Tina’s mouth to stop her from laughing. “Yeah, noisy as usual. Glad we don’t live here What? Oh, Aunt Eunice says hello.”

The roar of the jet was overwhelming now, as if Glen were standing in the middle of the runway.

“I’ll call you in the morning!” he shouted, his lips pressed against the mouthpiece. “Don’t worry, I—”

Suddenly the tape was silent. Then a new roaring began, but this time it was the roar of stock cars screeching at top speed around a racetrack.

“I’m not sure,” said Glen into the telephone, struggling to improvise. “I think some kids are drag-racing outside.”

Then the sound effects changed again. There was a screech of brakes, a blood-curdling scream, and the sound of a horrible collision. Nancy jumped up from the couch and tried to turn off the tape recorder, but her fingers found the fast-forward instead.

“I got to go, Mom,” said Glen, glaring at Tina as she dissolved into laughter on the couch. “I think there’s been an accident out front.”

Meanwhile, Nancy had managed to turn the machine back on. But now they were in the middle of a full-scale war, complete with chattering machine guns and exploding bombs.

“Right!” shouted Glen. “I’ll call the police. No, just some neighbors having a fight, I guess. I’m fine, Mom! I’ll call you in the morning.”

At last, Nancy found the stop button and the room was filled with blessed silence.

“Worked like a charm,” said Nancy as she and Tina exploded with laughter.

• • •

An hour later, Tina, Nancy, and Glen were relaxing in front of a cozy

fire and listening to soft music on the stereo.

"Maybe we should call Rod and ask him over," said Nancy as she snuggled up next to Glen on the couch.

"Rod and I are through," said Tina. She sat back and propped her feet up on the coffee table. "He's too much of a maniac."

"He should join the Marines," said Glen. "Maybe they could make something out of him. Like a hand grenade."

Tina laughed.

"See?" said Nancy "You're forgetting the bad dream already. Didn't I tell you?"

Tina shook her head sadly, the smile gone from her face.

"All day long I've been seeing that guy's weird face," she said. "And I keep hearing those fingernails—"

"Fingernails?" echoed Nancy, staring at her friend in amazement. "It's so strange that you're saying that. It made me remember the dream I had last night."

"What did you dream?"

"I dreamed about this guy in a dirty red and green sweater." Nancy suddenly felt very uncomfortable. "And he had these fingernails that he scraped along things. Actually, they were more like knives or something, like he'd made them himself. Anyway, they made this horrible screeching noise." Nancy imitated the chilling sound of metal scraping against metal, and Tina sat up straight in her chair.

"You dreamed about the same creep I did," she said.

"That's impossible," said Glen as the two girls stared at each other. "Two people can't—"

He stopped abruptly and looked out the window.

"What is it?" whispered Tina.

"Nothing," said Glen.

"There's somebody out there."

"I didn't hear anything," said Nancy.

And then they all heard it—the thin, sharp sound of something scraping against the house, just outside the window.

"Jesus," whispered Tina.

It was Glen who made the first move. He unlocked the door and stepped out into the darkness.

"I'm going to punch out your ugly lights, whoever you are," he announced, but the only answer was a slight rustling in the bushes. Glen promptly turned around and headed back toward the house, but the two girls prodded him farther into the darkness.

"It's only a stupid cat," he said a little more loudly than necessary as

he edged slowly toward the bushes. He stopped in his tracks as the unmistakable scraping sound again disturbed the silence of the night.

"Kitty, kitty?" said Glen, taking a few cautious steps forward. "Chow chow chow?"

There was no answer but complete and utter silence. Glen turned toward the girls with a shrug. He was about to speak when a large figure leaped out from behind a bush and threw him to the ground with a terrible shout.

Tina turned to run for help when she recognized the hulking figure of Rod Lane.

"And it's number thirty-six," the boy said, rising quickly to his feet, "bringing Lantz down just three yards from the goal with a brilliant tackle! And the fans go wild!"

Rod grinned wildly as he threw his arm around Tina's shoulders.

"What the hell are you doing here?" asked Tina.

"I come to make up," said Rod. He glanced toward the house. "Your ma home?"

"Of course," the girl lied. She noticed the metal object in Rod's right hand. "What's that?"

Rod held up a rusty old hand rake he had found lying in the yard and scraped it slowly against the side of the house. Tina winced as she heard the horrible screeching noise that had first attracted Glen's attention.

"Intense, huh?" said Rod, tossing the rake aside. "So what's happening? An orgy or something?"

"Maybe a funeral, you jerk," said Glen. He glared furiously at the boy who had just scared and humiliated him in front of the girls.

Rod turned to Glen sharply, and a switchblade knife suddenly appeared in his hand. Without a moment's hesitation, Nancy stepped between the two boys.

"It's a sleep-over date," she told Rod. "Just Tina and me. Glen was just leaving."

Rod stared at Glen for a few long seconds before closing the knife and slipping it back into his jacket pocket. Glen breathed a sigh of relief as Rod threw his arm around Tina again and laughed.

"You see his face?" he said, grinning as if he had just pulled off a brilliant practical joke. Then he glanced at the house again and sized up the situation. "Your ma ain't home, is she?" Without waiting for an answer, he took Tina by the arm and began dragging her toward the house. "Me and Tina got stuff to discuss," he said. "We got her mother's bed. You two got the rest."

Nancy waited uncertainly for a few seconds and then turned to

Glen.

"We should get out of here," she said.

Before Glen could reply, Tina reappeared at the front door. The top buttons of her blouse were already undone.

"You guys are hanging around, right?" she said. "Don't leave me alone with this lunatic."

Nancy watched as her friend disappeared back into the house. She knew Tina really wanted to spend the night with Rod, and yet …

"So we'll guard her together," said Glen, interrupting her thoughts. "Through the night."

Nancy looked at Glen and nodded.

"We're here for Tina, not for ourselves," she said. "Okay?"

In other words, Glen thought as he nodded in agreement, *I'm sleeping on the couch.* Sometimes he wished that Nancy could be a little more like her friend Tina.

"Why was she so bothered by a stupid nightmare, anyway?" he asked as they began walking back toward the house.

"Because it was scary that's all. Don't you think it's weird, both of us dreaming about the same guy?" Glen looked away, and Nancy felt a sudden chill. "You had a dream last night too, didn't you?"

Glen shrugged his shoulders.

"I never remember my dreams," he said. "All I know is, my mom's going to kill me when she does the wash. I practically ripped my sheet in half."

Nancy wanted to continue the conversation, but it was getting late and she was suddenly feeling very tired. She went inside with Glen and kissed him good night. Then she locked herself in Tina's bedroom, leaving Glen to make himself as comfortable as possible on the living room sofa. Glen was feeling tired too, and he might have fallen asleep immediately if it weren't for the sounds of passionate lovemaking that emanated from Tina's mother's bedroom. Glen couldn't help thinking about Rod and Tina furiously copulating upstairs while he and Nancy spent the night in separate rooms.

"Morality sucks," he said softly. Then he pulled the covers up over his head and tried to get some sleep.

Chapter 2

Tina had a reputation for being fast.

It wasn't something she was especially proud of, but it wasn't anything she lost sleep over, either. Tina knew she didn't really deserve her reputation. Sure, she had slept with a few boys, but that didn't mean she was some kind of pushover. She liked sex, and she knew how to protect herself. If she wanted to fool around once in a while, Tina figured it was nobody's damned business but her own.

"I knew there was something about you I liked," she said as she snuggled closer to Rod in her mother's bed that night.

"You feel better now, right?" he asked with a satisfied grin.

"Jungle man fix Jane," said Tina. Rod was definitely a little rough around the edges, but there was a vulnerable side to the boy that really turned Tina on.

"No more fights?" said Rod, his hand resting on Tina's small breast.

"No more fights," she agreed, feeling very sleepy and content. She thought about Nancy sleeping alone across the hall. It was hard for Tina to understand how her best friend could go out with a nice boy like Glen for so long without wanting to go all the way.

"Good night," said Rod, yawning loudly as he pulled the cover over his head. "No more nightmares for either of us, then."

Suddenly, Tina felt a cold chill race down her spine.

"When did you have a nightmare?" she asked.

"Guys have nightmares, too," said Rod. "You girls don't exactly have a corner on the market."

Tina stared at the unmoving figure beside her for a moment and then took a deep breath. She was glad to be here with Rod, and she wasn't going to let some dumb nightmare ruin things for her. Besides, she felt safe with Rod at her side. She watched him for a moment as he slept and then turned out the light.

Tonight, I'm finally going to get a good night's sleep, she thought. *Even if it kills me.*

She had not been asleep long when she heard the noise.

At first she thought it was just the faucet dripping. She tried not to pay attention, but the pinging noises were too loud and too persistent to be ignored.

"Rod?" she whispered, but the boy only snored steadily beside her.

She sat up in bed, wondering how Rod could sleep through all the racket. There was another ping, and Tina realized it was coming from outside. She stepped into her slippers and reached the window in time to see a pebble bounce off the glass.

"Jesus," she whispered. It was windy out, and the trees were blowing wildly in the darkness.

Suddenly, a large stone smashed into the glass, startling Tina as a thin and ragged crack appeared inside the windowpane.

Somebody threw that, thought Tina, suddenly furious at whoever was out there disturbing her precious sleep. Without thinking, she dashed down the stairs and stepped out into the darkness.

"Who are you?" she demanded, her voice small and thin in the howling wind. For a moment, she considered going back inside to get her robe, but something seemed to compel her to step farther into the blackness instead.

Then she was at the gate, stepping outside before turning around to look at the house. Only she couldn't see the familiar old house on Elm Street anymore. Instead, she seemed to be in an alley that she vaguely remembered seeing before in a dream. It was completely quiet now, except for the rushing of the wind. Then the metal lid of a trashcan came clattering down the alley, crashing to a halt at Tina's feet. She stared at the lid for a moment and took a deep breath to calm herself.

She was still assuring herself that everything was all right when she heard the horrible scraping of metal on cinderblock.

And there in the darkness she saw the man from her nightmare, his steel finger-knives raising bright yellow sparks as they screeched horribly along the alley wall. Tina turned, looking for a place. She was about to make a break for the end of the alley when the horrible man suddenly extended his long bony arms along the full length of the narrow alleyway, cutting off the girl's only escape route.

"Oh God," she whispered.

"This is God," replied the man hoarsely, his twisted mouth grinning obscenely as he clicked his razor-sharp blades in Tina's face.

And then she was running. She didn't know how she slipped past the man in the red and green sweater, and there was no time to stop and think it over. Tina was running for her life, faster than she had ever run before. But as fast as she ran, the man with the deadly finger-knives was never more than a few steps behind her. Tina was gasping for breath now, knocking over trashcans to slow down her pursuer, but nothing she did seemed to make any difference. Whenever she glanced over her shoulder, there he was, his hideous face leering at her from beneath his crumpled fedora and his deadly blades glittering in the moonlight.

Then, abruptly, Tina was no longer on the city streets, running instead across what seemed like an endless stretch of identical suburban lawns. Tina shouted for help, sure that someone would hear her and save her from the maniac who seemed determined to kill her. But there was no answer to her desperate cries, and the only sounds Tina could hear were those of her own labored breathing and the pounding of her bursting heart.

And then she stopped for a second to catch her breath and looked behind her.

There was no one there.

Thank God, she thought, her lungs aching after her long, hard run. She looked around to get her bearings and suddenly realized that she was on her own block again. Boring old Elm Street had never looked lovelier. Tina took a deep breath and gazed fondly at the big elm tree that had stood at that corner for as far back as anyone could remember.

And there stood the man in the filthy sweater, a look of mad triumph on his face. Tina didn't know how he had managed to hide behind the very tree she had been looking at, but there he was, large as life and a thousand times more frightening. Tina turned and ran, suddenly uncertain which of the almost identical houses on the block was her. Then she saw it, the low brick wall her father had built in front of the house not long before her folks had split up. She ran toward the house, the madman's foul breath hot on her neck. It seemed to take forever, but finally she reached the door and grabbed desperately for the knob.

Locked!

"Nancy!" she screamed, suddenly remembering that her friend was in the house. "Nancy! Open the door!"

"Nancy can't help you," said the madman, now standing behind her with a fiendish grin on his deformed face. "Nancy is still awake."

Still awake? thought Tina as she felt the razor-sharp blades slice through her thin nightgown and into her tender skin.

And suddenly she was inside, lying safely next to Rod in her mother's bed.

It was all just a dream, she told herself, smiling peacefully as her head sank back into the soft pillow. *Everything is going to be all right after all.*

Then she saw him, and she knew that nothing was going to be all right ever again.

Rod felt the bed shaking and opened his eyes.

"Tina?" he said, slowly remembering where he was and whom he

was with. But there was no answer except for the anguished cries and moans that seemed to be coming from somewhere deep inside the mattress. His heart pounding, Rod yanked the cover off the bed. He stared in horror at the sight of Tina thrashing about wildly in her sleep. Then suddenly her body stiffened as if someone or something was pinning her to the bed, and her nightgown was roughly pulled open by unseen hands. Rod watched helplessly as four long bloody gashes appeared across the girl's stomach, followed by four more and then four more until Tina and the entire bed were soaked in a river of blood.

Rod screamed and reached for the light. Suddenly, Tina's body rose from the bed as if lifted by invisible hands and swung through the air like a human baseball bat, knocking Rod to the floor. He lay there and watched in mute horror as Tina's mangled corpse slid feetfirst up the bedroom wall, leaving behind a trail of gore.

"What the hell is going on?" Rod screamed, fighting back the tears and vomit as he watched the bloody pulp that was once Tina Gray hanging limp and lifeless from the ceiling, suspended by some invisible and insanely sadistic power. His screams began in earnest as the girl's slashed remains plopped down like a sack of blood, splashing Rod and everything in the room as it hit the bed with a sickening thud.

Nancy sat up in bed just as the body fell from the ceiling. She arrived at the bedroom door just moments before Glen.

"What's going on?" asked Glen.

"I don't know," said Nancy, pulling on the door and finding it locked. From the other side, she could hear Rod's desperate threats.

"Who did this?" he screamed, glaring around helplessly in search of whoever or whatever had murdered Tina. "I swear I'll kill you for this!"

"Rod?" said Nancy, pounding on the door. "You'd better not hurt Tina!"

And then Rod began to make the horrible rasping noise that Nancy would never forget for as long as she lived. She was still trying to decide whether he was laughing or crying when Glen barreled into the door like the star football player that he was. The door burst open and Nancy rushed in.

And saw the blood.

Tina's blood.

The same blood that soaked the bed, the walls, the ceiling, and the curtains around the window through which Rod had made his escape.

And then Nancy saw the hacked remains of her friend's body.

She wanted to cry, but she didn’t. Tears wouldn’t bring Tina back to life, and they wouldn’t catch the sadistic son of a bitch that had killed her.

Someone would pay for this. Nancy swore it even as the vomit began to surge upward from her throbbing guts.

Chapter 3

Don Thompson had never wanted to be anything but a cop.

Long after his boyhood pals had outgrown their dreams of becoming firemen or baseball players and settled for more mundane careers as accountants and insurance salesmen, Don Thompson continued in the pursuit of his lifelong ambition. He joined the Springwood Police Department right after being graduated from high school and quickly worked his way up through the ranks. By the time he earned his sergeant stripes, Don Thompson was happily married to his high school sweetheart and the father of a beautiful baby girl. Unfortunately, Marge Thompson soon discovered that the life of a police officer's wife was not nearly so exciting or glamorous as she had hoped. By the time Thompson made lieutenant, he was a divorcé with an ex-wife who drank too much and a beautiful teenage daughter whom he didn't see nearly so often as he wanted to.

Thompson was dreaming about the old days when he and Marge were still able to carry on a civil conversation when he was abruptly awakened by the emergency telephone call. He dressed quickly, gulped down a cup of coffee, and drove himself downtown to the police station. It was Jerry Parker, one of the new patrolmen, who met him at the door.

"What have you got?" asked Thompson, getting right down to business as usual. He would never admit it to anyone, but this was exactly the sort of case he used to fantasize about when he was a little boy dreaming about growing up to be a cop. Murders didn't happen every day in quiet suburban communities like Springwood, and the ones that did were usually open-and-shut cases of a drunken husband shooting his wife over some real or imagined infidelity.

"Razor was the weapon, according to the coroner," said Parker, glancing at the report in his hand. "Or razors, more likely. Looks like it was the victim's boyfriend that did it. Guy by the name of Lane."

"Lane," echoed the lieutenant, not sounding very surprised.

"Musician type. Couple of priors for brawling, drunk and disorderly. A real troublemaker. Anyway, we got no parents to claim the body. According to the other kids, the father split a couple of years ago and the mother's in Vegas. We're trying to reach her now."

"Terrific," said the lieutenant as they reached the interrogation room. "What the hell was she doing there?"

“She lives there,” said the puzzled patrolman.

“I don’t mean *her,”* said the lieutenant, sounding very annoyed. He turned to the girl who sat beside her mother in the brightly lit room. “I mean *you.”*

Nancy Thompson looked up at her father.

“What was she doing there?” he demanded, turning angrily to his ex-wife.

“Hello to you too, Donald,” said Marge Thompson, a cigarette in her trembling hand.

“Marge,” he replied, struggling to control his quick temper. He took a deep breath and looked at Nancy. “How you doing, baby?” he asked, forcing himself to smile.

“I’m okay, Dad,” said Nancy, disturbed by her father’s unconvincing smile. She wondered if she looked anywhere near as bad as she felt inside.

“That’s good,” said the lieutenant, exchanging a worried look with his ex-wife. Then he looked hard into Nancy’s eyes and took another deep breath. As a police officer, he knew he needed to be patient and tactful in extracting the necessary information from the girl. But as a father, there were questions he wanted answers to right away.

“I don’t want to get into this now,” he began. “God knows you need time.” He paused for a second, and suddenly the anger and frustration of the frightened father overwhelmed the cool detachment of the trained cop. “But I’d sure like to know what the hell you were doing shacked up with three other kids in the middle of the night. Especially when one of them is a lunatic delinquent like Rod Lane.”

Nancy recoiled as if she had been slapped.

“Rod’s not a lunatic,” she said, knowing even as she spoke how absurd her words must sound.

“You got a sane explanation for what he did?”

“Tell him how jealous Rod was,” said Marge, placing a hand on her daughter’s trembling shoulder. “Tell him about the fight they had.”

“It wasn’t that serious,” said Nancy quietly, sloughing deeper in her chair as she struggled to make sense of the terrible thing that had happened that night.

“Not serious?” said her mother. “You don’t think murder is serious?”

Then suddenly Nancy was sitting upright, her eyes flashing with indignation.

“Tina was my best friend in the whole world!” she shouted. “How can you say I don’t take her death seriously?” Marge nodded to indicate her apology, and Nancy continued in a softer tone. “All I

meant was that their fights weren't that serious." She was quiet for a moment, and then suddenly she remembered why Tina had asked her over in the first place. "Tina dreamed this would happen," she whispered, more to herself than to her mother or father.

"What?"

"She had a nightmare about somebody trying to kill her. That's why we were there. She was scared to sleep alone."

"Of all the—" the lieutenant began, but Marge cut him off in mid-sentence.

"Nancy's been through enough for one night," she said. "You have her statement." Then, ignoring her ex-husband's glare, she took her daughter's hand and stood up. Thompson was about to order them to sit down and then thought better of it.

He would have to have a long talk with Marge about the way she was bringing up their daughter, but this was clearly neither the time nor the place for that discussion.

Don Thompson was on the phone with his ex-wife early the next morning while Nancy stood transfixed in front of the television and listened to the local news.

"In the headlines this morning," said the announcer, "the brutal murder of a local teenage girl at an all-night party in Springwood. Police say the victim, fifteen-year-old Tina Gray, had been arguing with her boyfriend shortly before last night's bloody slaying. The boyfriend, Rod Lane, is now the subject of a citywide manhunt. According to police, the murder weapon appears to have been a straight razor or similar sharp object …"

"I have to go," said Marge, promptly hanging up the phone as she rushed to turn off the television. She arrived too late to stop Nancy from seeing the film of the body bag being carried from Tina's house to the coroner's van. Marge wondered how much of his influence her ex-husband had used to keep their daughter's name out of the story and the reporters away from their door.

"Don't go to school today, kiddo," she said, taking Nancy in her arms and giving her a quick hug. "You need your sleep. I heard you tossing and turning all night."

"I've got to go to school, Mother," said Nancy, gently freeing herself from her mother's embrace. "Otherwise I'll sit up there and go crazy."

"Did you sleep at all?"

"I'll sleep in study hall," Nancy promised. "I'd rather keep busy, you know?"

Marge nodded and kissed Nancy on the forehead. Sometimes she

wished she were as good as her daughter was at handling difficulties. For Marge, booze had always seemed like the easiest way to make troubles disappear.

"Come right home after?" she said.

"Right home," Nancy promised, hugging her mother one more time before picking up her books and heading off for school.

Nancy had only walked a few blocks when she began to get the feeling that she was being watched.

She turned around and noticed a tall man in dark glasses standing across the street. For a second she thought she saw the man staring at her.

My best friend just got killed, she thought. *I guess I'm entitled to be a little jumpy.*

She took a few more steps and then glanced back over her shoulder.

The man with the dark glasses was gone.

Don't be paranoid, she told herself, although she couldn't imagine how the man had managed to disappear so abruptly. Then she took a deep breath of the fresh morning air and walked a little more quickly toward Springwood High.

She was only a block away from school when a strong hand clamped over her mouth and she was dragged into the bushes.

Nancy had barely begun to struggle when she realized she was being held by Rod Lane.

"Don't scream," he whispered. "I'm not going to hurt you." He waited until Nancy stopped struggling before removing his hand from her mouth. "Your old man thinks I did it, don't he?"

"Did you?" asked Nancy as calmly as she could with her heart pounding like a jackhammer.

"Of course not," said Rod angrily "I never touched her."

"You were screaming like a madman."

"Someone else was there," he said, knowing even as he spoke how crazy he must have sounded.

Nancy looked at Rod for a long moment and shook her head. Instinctively, she knew he was telling the truth. And yet …

"The front door was still locked when the police came," she said, trying very hard to make sense of Rod's story. "And the bedroom door was locked from your side."

"Don't look at me like I'm some kind of fruitcake," said Rod. "I swear I never hurt Tina."

Nancy nodded and was about to say that she believed him when she realized he was staring over her shoulder.

“Good morning, Rod,” said a familiar voice. Nancy turned to see her father standing behind her with his police .38 pointed squarely between Rod’s eyes. “Now just move away from her, son. Really easy like your ass depended on it.”

Rod looked at Nancy for just a second and then lunged wildly out of the bushes. Nancy stared in horror as her father raised his revolver to a firing position.

“No!” she screamed, jumping between Rod and her father.

“Are you crazy?” shouted Thompson, pushing Nancy aside as he took off after Rod. The chase was a short one. Rod had already been wrestled to the ground by the tall man in the dark glasses. Even as two uniformed policemen roughly shoved Rod into the squad car, Nancy could hear the boy insisting that he hadn’t done anything. She waited until the car door slammed before turning angrily to her father.

“You used me!” she screamed.

“What the hell did you expect?” he asked, bewildered and more than a little annoyed by his daughter’s attitude. “And what are you doing in school today, anyway?”

Nancy thought of a thousand things she wanted to say, but none of them seemed to express exactly what was in her heart at that moment. Instead, she simply turned away and strode briskly toward the school building.

“Hey, Nancy!” the lieutenant shouted, but his daughter ignored him and kept on walking. He stood there staring and wondering what in the hell was going on.

I guess I’ll never understand women, thought Don Thompson as he turned around and walked slowly toward his car.

Chapter 4

It was hard enough to stay awake in Mrs. Solomon's English class under the best of circumstances. After two sleepless nights and the murder of her best friend, Nancy was finding it just about impossible to keep her eyes open.

Mrs. Solomon was reading a passage from *Julius Caesar,* and Nancy tried very hard to stifle a yawn. She was a good English student, but somehow she had never been able to warm up to Shakespeare. If only he had written in plain English and left out all those *methinks* and *forsooths* …

" 'In the most high and palmy state of Rome,' " read the teacher, her voice rising and falling dramatically as if to remind the class that they were listening to great poetry, " 'a little ere the mightiest Julius fell …' "

Nancy jerked her head, suddenly realizing that her eyes had closed for just a moment.

" 'The graves stood tenantless,' " Mrs. Solomon continued, " 'and the sheeted dead did squeak and gibber in the Roman street …' "

Squeak and gibber, Nancy silently repeated, her head now resting comfortably on her upturned palm. She wondered how much longer it would be until study hall. It would be so nice to sit in the back of the auditorium with her eyes closed, maybe even to take a little nap before her next class. She closed her eyes for a just a second, her breath slow and steady as the teacher droned on from the front of the room.

Then she heard someone softly call her name, and her eyes snapped open.

"Tina?" she whispered. She looked out into the hallway through the open classroom door and saw the body bag. It was the same size and shape as the bag she had seen on television, but it seemed to be moving ever so slightly.

Nancy shook her head and wiped the sleep from her eyes with the back of her hand. When she looked again, the bag was gone.

In its place was a long dark smear of dried blood.

" 'O God,' " continued Mrs. Solomon, " 'I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a kind of infinite space were it not that I have bad dreams …' "

Bad dreams, echoed Nancy silently, slipping out of her seat. No one

paid any attention as she turned and strode purposefully out of the room.

Then she heard Tina call her name once more.

There, at the end of the hall, was the body bag, one pale hand hanging out through the partially open zipper. Nancy watched as the bag slowly slid out of sight, leaving a dark trail of slime in its wake.

“Tina!” she called, racing down the hall and around the corner. She didn’t see the hall monitor coming the other way until the two girls collided and fell to the floor.

“No running in the halls!” said the girl with the oversize badge pinned to her sweater as Nancy rose quickly to her feet. “Let me see your pass!”

Nancy looked down the hall and saw the body bag sliding slowly down a dimly lit corridor that she couldn’t quite remember ever having seen before.

“Screw your pass!” Nancy shouted, pushing the other girl out of the way as she watched the bag turn into a narrow doorway. Nancy raced down the hall in time to hear the bag tumbling down a long flight of stairs.

“Hey!” yelled the hall monitor. Nancy turned and saw that the girl was now bleeding profusely from her eyes and ears. There was a smile on the girl’s blood-smeared face and a wild look in her eyes as she waved at Nancy.

“No running in the halls,” she said, her fingers tipped with long, razor-sharp knives.

Nancy turned away in horror. Stepping through the doorway, she saw a long narrow stairway and heard a steady throbbing noise from down below. Nancy hesitated for only a second and then followed the trail of slime down the stairs.

She was in a boiler room, but it was like no boiler room she had ever seen before, except perhaps in a vaguely remembered dream. There was something frighteningly oversized about everything in the room, from the rumbling machinery itself to the seemingly endless network of tunnels, ladders, and catwalks. And everywhere there was steam, hot and suffocating. Nancy stood perfectly still and wiped the sweat from her forehead while her eyes slowly adjusted to the dim orange light that emanated from deep within the bowels of the massive boiler.

And suddenly she heard it—the horrible screeching of metal on metal that she still remembered so clearly from her last nightmare.

“Who are you?” she demanded, turning to face the man she knew she would see, the man in the dirty sweater and the deadly finger-

knives.

But the man didn't answer. He only smiled as he slowly raked his razor-sharp nails across his own chest. Nancy gagged in disgust as the skin slowly parted to release a yellow fluid squirming with hundreds of tiny worms and maggots.

And then the chase was on. Nancy was running as fast as she could through a maze of steaming pipes, but the man with the razor-blade fingers was never more than a few steps behind. The openings seemed to be growing smaller and smaller as Nancy weaved her way through the labyrinth. She heard her own loud breathing and the pounding of her heart, and she knew she couldn't run much longer. Ahead of her was a brick wall and behind her the maniac with his blades of death. Nancy looked desperately to the left and to the right, but there seemed to be no escape. She stopped, her back to the wall and nowhere left to run. The madman stood before her, a twisted smile of victory on his ugly mouth as he flashed his blades in front of Nancy's face.

There must be some way out of this nightmare, thought Nancy, refusing even at that terrifying moment to give up hope.

This nightmare, she repeated, something strange and almost unfathomable suddenly clicking into place in her mind. Then, taking a deep breath, Nancy wheeled around and pressed her right forearm against one of the scalding steam pipes.

The pain was unlike anything she had ever felt, and her own scream echoed over and over again in her head as she fell to her knees in agony.

And then she was on her feet, only she was no longer in some dank and steamy boiler room. Rather, she was back in Mrs. Solomon's English class, standing beside her desk with her books clattering noisily to the floor.

"Are you all right?" asked Mrs. Solomon, rushing to the girl's side. Nancy looked around, still groggy from her nightmare, and discovered that every eye in the class was on her. She whirled around and stared at the open classroom door, half expecting to find the man with the finger-knives standing there, laughing his horrible raspy laugh.

The hallway was empty.

"I'll call your mother," said Mrs. Solomon, bending down to help Nancy retrieve her books.

"No!" said the girl with more emphasis than she had intended. "No, really, I'm all right. I'll just go home." She grabbed her books from the startled teacher and hurried quickly out the door.

"You'll need a hall pass! shouted Mrs. Solomon, but Nancy was already out of earshot. She didn't stop walking until she was out of the building. When she reached the clump of bushes that Rod had pulled

her into that morning to protest his innocence, Nancy stopped, put down her books, and rested against the cool bark of a nearby tree.

"I'm not going to cry," she said out loud. She took a deep breath and forced herself to think back to the terrible nightmare. It didn't seem so bad remembering that horrible boiler room when she was standing in the light of day breathing the fresh afternoon air. Still, the dream had seemed so incredibly real. And wasn't it just like the dream Tina had described the other day? It was all so weird, but Nancy was determined to find a logical explanation. "There's nothing to be afraid of," she whispered to herself. After all, a nightmare couldn't really hurt anybody, could it?

It wasn't until she reached down to pick up her books that Nancy saw the fresh scald mark on her right forearm.

"Is my dad here?" Nancy asked the burly desk sergeant at the police station.

Despite her promise, Nancy had not gone directly home. Instead, she had taken the bus to the police station where Rod Lane was being held on suspicion of murder.

The sergeant looked at Nancy for a moment and nodded, recognizing the same no-nonsense tone of voice he had so often heard from her father. The sergeant picked up his telephone, and a moment later Don Thompson stepped out of his office.

"Taking the day off after all?" he asked, smiling at Nancy. He stopped smiling when he saw the grimly determined look on the girl's face.

"Dad, I want to see Rod Lane."

"Only family allowed, honey. You know the rules."

"I just want to talk to him for a second."

"The kid's dangerous," said Thompson.

"You don't know that he did it."

"No, I don't know for sure," the lieutenant conceded. "What I do know is that he was in a locked room last night with a girl who went in alive and came out in a rubber bag."

Nancy flinched as if she had been struck.

"I just want to talk to him," she said, her voice now soft and pleading. "Please? Dad?"

Lieutenant Thompson glanced at the sergeant. The man behind the big oak desk shrugged his shoulders and quickly looked away.

You can't always go by the book, Thompson reminded himself. It was a principle that Marge had often insisted upon during the last stormy

years of their marriage.

"Make it fast," he said, calling for a patrolman to show Nancy to the holding cell.

"Tell me everything that happened last night," said Nancy when she was alone with Rod Lane, and for the next several minutes Rod did exactly that.

"That's crazy," said Nancy when the boy finished his story.

"You think I don't know that?" he said, jumping nervously to his feet and pacing the small cell. Nancy thought he looked more like a trapped animal than a human being.

"How could somebody get into bed and under the covers with you guys without your knowing it?" she asked.

"How the fuck do I know?" It was obviously a question to which Rod had given a great deal of unproductive thought. "I don't expect you to believe me anyway."

"Did you get a look at him?"

"No."

"Then how do you know somebody was there?"

"Because I saw him cut her!" Rod yelled. A guard poked his head into the cell and Nancy waved him away.

"Somebody cut her while you watched," she said quietly, "but you don't know what he looked like?"

Rod paused and then stared at the wall as he spoke.

"You couldn't see the fucker," he said, his voice low and seemingly far away. "You could just see the cuts happening, all at once. He cut her and dragged her around, up the wall, over the ceiling." He paused and swallowed, and Nancy saw that there were tears in his eyes. "And then he just dropped her. And there was blood. Blood everywhere." He stopped again and looked at Nancy, his eyes begging her to believe him.

"Tell me about the cuts," said Nancy, trying hard to control the tremble in her voice.

"It's like I said. It was as if there were four straight razors all cutting her at the same time. But the razors were invisible. She just … opened up."

He stopped suddenly and smashed his fist against the wall, his eyes now filled with tears.

"I could have saved her," he said, gasping for breath. "I could have moved faster. Only I was sure it was just another nightmare."

"Nightmare?" echoed Nancy.

"Yeah. Like the one I had before. There was this guy who had

knives for fingers."

Nancy turned and grabbed hold of the bars, her knuckles white as she squeezed with all her might to keep from crying out loud. There was a long silence before Rod spoke again.

"You think I did it?" he asked.

"No," she said.

I only wish I did, she thought as the guard unlocked the door.

Chapter 5

Nancy Thompson soaked peacefully in the bathtub with her eyes closed and prayed that the hot sudsy water could somehow soothe away all her cares.

The last couple of days had been some of the longest and strangest days of her life, and not getting any sleep was definitely not helping her jangled nerves.

It was so pleasant, lying in the tub. Nancy felt as if she could almost forget about Tina and Rod and the man in the nightmare if she could just drift off into a long, peaceful slumber. Already, she could begin to feel reality fading quietly away as she slipped into a light, blissful sleep …

"Nancy!"

Nancy's eyes snapped open at the sound of her mother's voice calling her name from the other side of the door.

"What is it?" she asked, feeling somewhat annoyed at having been so abruptly awoken.

"Don't fall asleep in there," said her mother. "People drown in the bathtub every day, you know."

"Oh, Mother!" said Nancy. *I wasn't actually falling asleep,* she assured herself. *There's a big difference between falling asleep and resting your eyes.*

"I've got some warm milk for you," her mother continued. "Why don't you get out of there and jump into bed?"

"I'll be out in a few minutes," said Nancy She waited until her mother walked away before adding, "Warm milk. Gross!"

I suppose I really should be getting out, thought Nancy as she settled back to enjoy one more relaxing minute in the tub. She closed her eyes again and began to sing softly the counting song she and the other neighborhood children used to sing when they were very small: "One, two, Freddy's coming for you. Three, four, better lock your door." She stopped and yawned. The warm water felt so nice …

And suddenly something was dragging her under the water. She tried to grab on to the sides of the tub, only it felt more like being in a bottomless well than a bathtub. Down and down she went, until she could no longer see the surface of the tub. Kicking wildly, she struggled to free herself from whatever diabolical force was pulling her ever downward, trying to drown her in the cold, dark waters. She

wanted to scream for help, but she knew that her only chance was to hold her breath for as long as she could and somehow fight her way back up to the light. Her lungs aching, she thrust her shoulders forward and arched her back, determined to save herself at any cost.

This can't be happening, she told herself over and over again, as if her believing it was all a dream would somehow make a difference.

And then she heard her mother's voice calling out her name. The voice was muffled and indistinct, but it was clear enough to serve as a precious link between Nancy and the world outside her nightmare. With one last burst of willpower, Nancy thrust her head and shoulders above the surface of the water and opened her eyes wide.

"Mommy?" she cried, gasping and choking as she filled her aching lungs with air. Her mother was kneeling at the side of the tub now, cradling her daughter's head in her arms as she began to wrap her with a large terrycloth bath towel.

"Are you okay?" asked Marge, rubbing Nancy gently with the towel. Nancy nodded, gazing in bewilderment at the tub that seemed only moments ago to be a bottomless pit. "Time to get into bed, young lady," said her mother, "and I don't want to hear any argument."

"Okay, Mom," said Nancy, still struggling to catch her breath. "Let me finish drying off and I'll be out in a minute."

"Promise?"

"Promise," said Nancy. Her mother paused for just a moment and then left the room.

Nancy was putting on her robe a few moments later when she noticed the dark scald mark on her right forearm. She gazed at it for a long time and then turned unhesitantly to the medicine cabinet. It only took her a few seconds to find the box of NoDoz and slip it into the pocket of her robe.

"And no school tomorrow either," said her mother as she escorted Nancy to her bedroom. "I want you to relax and get some rest."

"Okay, Mom," said Nancy, thinking that a little rest sounded awfully good.

"Take this." Her mother handed her a small yellow pill and a glass of water. "It'll help you sleep."

Nancy looked at her mother for a moment and then took the pill. She put it in her mouth and then swallowed the water.

"Sleep tight," said Marge, looking very relieved as she kissed her daughter on the forehead. "Things'll look brighter in the morning."

Nancy said good night and waited for her mother to leave the room. As soon as the bedroom door was closed, she spit the yellow pill into her hand and tossed it out the window. Then she popped a couple of

NoDoz tablets into her mouth, turned on her bedside lamp, and settled back for what promised to be a very long night.

It was a little after midnight when Nancy heard the noise.

Slowly, as if in a dream, she climbed out of bed and walked toward the window. It was a windy night, and Nancy could hear the rustling of the curtains in the window across the street as they blew gently in the cool night breeze.

And then someone appeared out of the darkness, his hand clamped onto Nancy's mouth to muffle her scream. She was about to sink her teeth into the hand as hard as she could when she suddenly recognized a familiar class ring.

"It's me," whispered Glen, taking his hand away from her mouth. "I saw your light was on, so I thought I'd see how you were doing."

Nancy took a deep, calming breath and shook her head slowly from side to side.

"Sometimes I wish you didn't live right across the street," she said. Actually she was very glad to see Glen at that moment.

"Shut up and let me in," said Glen, climbing through the window. "You ever try balancing on a rose trellis on a windy night?" He entered the room and plopped down on the bed.

"If you don't mind," said Nancy, pointing at the chair with a slight smile on her face.

"So," said Glen, moving quickly to the chair, "I understand you freaked out in English today."

Nancy glanced at the door to make sure her mother hadn't heard.

"Guess I did," she admitted.

"Haven't slept yet, have you?"

"Not really."

"What did you do to your arm?" asked Glen.

"Burned myself in English class," she replied. Nancy looked at herself in the mirror and winced. "My God!" she said. "I look twenty years old!"

And that's when the plan began to take shape in Nancy's mind.

"Listen," she said, "I've got a crazy favor to ask."

"Uh-oh," said Glen.

"It's nothing hard. I'm just going to look for someone, and I need you to stand guard. Okay?"

"Sure," said Glen doubtfully. "I think."

"Listen," said Nancy, coming very close. "This is very important, and I don't want you to screw up. A whole lot might depend on it."

"I won't screw up," said Glen. "When did I ever screw up?"

"Just pay attention and listen," said Nancy, ignoring his question. She climbed back into bed and turned out the light. "Here's what we're going to do—"

"It's dark in here," Glen interrupted, a mischievous grin on his face.

"And it's not what you're thinking," said Nancy as she began to explain her plan.

• • •

Nancy is walking down Elm Street in her nightgown. The wind is howling, but Nancy doesn't feel cold. She is strangely exhilarated like a hunter in search of prey, but she feels the fear of the prey as well. With each step she takes, she is prepared for the sudden lunge of a madman from behind a tree or bush, but she is literally too tired to hide any longer. Besides, she knows that she is not alone.

"Are you still there, Glen?" she whispers, and she hears the boy's reassuring reply as if from a great distance.

Onward into the night she goes, and soon she is no longer walking past the neatly manicured lawns of suburban Springwood. It's darker now, and there's an alley up ahead. She hesitates for just a moment and then enters deeper into the shadows in determined pursuit of her quarry. At any moment, she expects to see the flashing of razor-sharp blades, and she prays that she can do what needs to be done before it's too late.

But nothing happens, and for a moment Nancy thinks that the waiting is no less terrifying than the confrontation that she both yearns for and fears.

"Glen?" she whispers. There is no answer. "Glen!" she repeats a little bit louder as a drop of sweat drips off the tip of her nose.

"I'm here," says the voice, but this time it is followed by a loud yawn.

"Stay awake," Nancy commands, but Glen doesn't reply.

Suddenly she is standing in front of the police station. There is a light on in the basement, and Nancy moves closer to peer inside. The window is barred, and through the window she sees Rod Lane sleeping on a hard cot. He's tossing and turning as if in the middle of some terrible nightmare. Nancy calls his name, trying to wake him, but it's no use. He can't hear her.

And then someone is inside the cell with him, and Nancy knows at once exactly who it is.

"Glen!" she says in a loud whisper, but there is no reply. She calls his name again but hears only the soft, steady sound of his snoring.

And inside the cell, the man with the dirty sweater and the battered fedora is holding Rod's bed sheet in his powerful hands, twisting it carefully into an instrument of death as he steps slowly toward the boy's sleeping form.

Without thinking, Nancy begins pounding on the glass behind the bars.

"Watch out!" she screams. Rod rolls over with a troubled groan as the madman's eyes shift to the girl outside the cell. They are ugly piggish eyes, and they are filled with a loathing beyond anything in Nancy's wildest imaginings. As the monster takes a step toward Nancy, Rod sits up and opens his eyes. Suddenly, the madman is gone. Nancy screams Rod's name again, but the boy never looks in her direction. Instead, he throws himself back down on the cot and pulls the thin cover back over his broad shoulders. And there once again, standing in the shadows, is the man with the red and green sweater, the twisted sheet clenched tightly in his hands.

Suddenly, Nancy turns around and sees Tina staring at her from inside a body bag. The dead girl opens her mouth to speak, but only a long black centipede slithers out of her mouth. Nancy looks down to avoid her friend's dead eyes and sees an oozing mass of slimy snakes and eels swarming at the girl's feet.

"Glen!" she screams, turning her eyes away in disgust. She calls his name again, and this time there is a reply. The voice comes from directly behind her, but it is not the voice of Glen Lantz.

"I'm here," croaks the madman, his foul breath hot on Nancy's exposed neck.

Nancy pitches back just in time to avoid the deadly swoop of the creature's finger-knives. And then she begins to run, screaming Glen's name over and over again, but knowing that he won't answer.

Knowing that he has finally screwed up when it really counted.

And Nancy runs. She runs through city streets and down narrow alleyways, and always the man with the finger-knives is running right behind. Her heart and lungs bursting, Nancy finds herself running down suburban streets that seem strangely familiar and yet totally alien at the same time. For a moment, she thinks she sees her house, but it is merely some colonial-style house with a well-cared-for lawn like millions of such homes in suburban communities all over the country. *If I can get home, I'll be safe,* Nancy tells herself, although she knows there is no logical basis for her belief. Still, with death just a few feet behind, a girl has to believe in something if she's going to survive.

And then Nancy is on her own front lawn and racing toward the door. *I don't have keys,* she thinks, convinced for just a moment that

the end is finally at hand. But the door is unlocked, and Nancy pushes it open before throwing all her weight against the inside of the door and locking both locks from the inside.

"Glen!" she yells, but again she hears only his persistent snoring.

Nancy looks at herself in the hallway mirror. Her face is dirty and smeared with sweat and tears. She is still breathing hard and her pulse races, but she is beginning to feel as if maybe she is safe at last.

And then the silence of the night is broken by a terrible scraping sound at the window, and Nancy sees the madman scratching at the glass with his incredibly sharp blades. To her horror, the glass gives way at the edges and the leering madman pushes the rest of the window out of the frame with a frightening crash.

"Jesus!" says Nancy out loud as she runs up the stairs for the safety of her own private room. But the floor beneath her feet is no longer the solid surface it had always been before. The soft shaggy carpeting on the stairway has turned to something with the disgusting texture of quicksand, clinging to her ankles like warm molasses, slowing her movements to an agonizing crawl just when speed is most of the essence. Struggling slowly up the stairs with gooey globs of slime grasping at her ankles, Nancy hears the madman push his way through the window and stagger noisily across the living room.

And then she's in her room, the door securely locked behind her. She puts her ear to the door. Silence.

"This is just a dream," she reminds herself, glancing at her reflection in the full-length mirror on her closet door.

And then Nancy's image shatters into a thousand pieces as the mad killer crashes through the mirror and seizes her by the throat amidst a shower of broken glass!

They fall back on the bed, Nancy summoning every ounce of strength at her command to hold back the wrist of the killer's knife hand, its glittering blades just an inch from her throat. Nancy looks at the man's face, twisted with hate despite his sadistic grin, and senses that he is just playing with her, that he can break away from her grasp and slit her throat at any moment he might choose.

Suddenly, she lets go of his hand. She rolls away just as the deadly blades come down and slice through her new feather pillow. Feathers fly everywhere as Nancy rolls off the bed, searching for a corner of sanctuary in her once safe and familiar room. The madman seems unperturbed by the blizzard of feathers that fill the room as he grabs Nancy by the wrist, knocking over the night table at the side of her bed as they tumble roughly to the floor. She is pinned beneath him now with no escape. She looks into his hideous face and sees a look of triumph on his scarred features that fills her with loathing. His deadly

blades just an inch from her eyes, Nancy quickly decides upon her final act in life and spits in the madman's face.

"Die!" he whispers, and Nancy is prepared to do exactly that when the alarm clock at her side suddenly goes off with a deafening ring.

Nancy opened her eyes to find herself in bed. She looked around wildly before reaching over to turn off the alarm clock. In the chair next to the bed, Glen sat up and wiped the sleep from his eyes.

"You bastard," said Nancy, glaring at Glen with a fury greater than any she had ever known before in her life.

"What did I do?" asked Glen, truly bewildered by the anger and hurt in Nancy's voice. He reached out to her, but she pulled away and flattened herself against the wall.

"I ask you to do one simple thing," she said, her voice and eyes hard. "Just stay awake and watch me. Just wake me if it looks like I'm having a bad dream." She paused and shook her head, overwhelmed by the enormity of Glen's incompetence. "And what do you do? You fall asleep!"

Glen gazed at her in silence, unsure of what words to offer in his own defence. He was about to apologize when he heard Nancy's mother calling the girl's name.

"Shit!" he said and dashed out the window just as Nancy's mother appeared at the bedroom door.

"Are you okay?" Marge asked.

Nancy paused and took a deep, calming breath before making her reply. "I'm all right," she said. "I just had a little dream."

"Okay," said her mother doubtfully. "If you need anything, just call."

"Okay, Mom. Good night."

Marge said good night and closed the door behind her.

Nancy waited until she heard her mother's footsteps fade away before sitting up and glancing out the window.

"Glen?" she said. But all she saw was a single bone-white feather floating by in the moonlight.

Chapter 6

"I have to see Rod Lane right away," said Nancy.

The burly desk sergeant looked at her for a long moment and then looked at Glen standing beside her. The boy looked as if he had no idea what he was doing in the police station in the middle of the night.

"When I took the night shift," said the sergeant with a weary sigh, "I thought I'd have some peace and quiet for a change."

"It's urgent," said Nancy. "I have to see Rod right away."

The sergeant glanced at the clock on the wall over the door. "It's three o'clock in the morning," he said. "Your mother know you're out this late?"

Nancy was about to make up some sort of story when she saw her father emerge from his office with a Styrofoam cup of black coffee in his hand.

"Daddy!" she said. "What are you doing here?"

"It happens that I work here. There's an unsolved murder investigation going on, and I don't much care for unsolved murders. Especially ones that my daughter's mixed up in. The question is, What the hell are *you* doing here at this hour?"

"Nancy had a nightmare," said Glen. "She says Rod's in some kind of trouble, and …" His voice trailed off as his eyes met Lieutenant Thompson's icy stare.

"I just want to see if he's okay," Nancy told her father, her gaze unyielding and deadly serious.

"The guy's sleeping like a baby," said the lieutenant, glancing briefly at his watch. "Believe me, Nancy, your friend Rod isn't going anywhere tonight."

"Just check, Daddy," she pleaded. "That's all I'm asking."

Lieutenant Thompson looked hard at his daughter and then glanced at the sergeant. It had been a long day and a longer night, and the lieutenant was looking forward to going home and getting a good night's sleep. Obviously, he wasn't going anywhere until Nancy was safe and sound back on Elm Street.

"Just one look," he said at last. "And then I'm personally driving you back home." He nodded to the sergeant, who immediately opened the top drawer of his desk.

“Now where the hell did I put that key?” the sergeant muttered as he fumbled around in the open drawer.

And while the sergeant looked for the key, Rod Lane slept in a locked cell in the back of the police station. His rest was an uneasy one, however, for Rod was in the middle of a nightmare. Only this nightmare was more real, more terrifying than any nightmare Rod had ever had before. This nightmare was about a deformed madman who wore a dirty sweater and a crumpled hat and had only one obsessive thought in his twisted mind.

The madman wanted Rod dead.

And in his dream, Rod fought mightily with the man in the red and green sweater, knowing even as he struggled that his own mortal strength was no match for that of the maniac who was determined to take his life.

If Lieutenant Thompson had arrived a few moments earlier, he would have seen Rod’s bed sheet begin to move as if it had a life of its own. He would have watched in stunned disbelief as the sheet slithered like some deadly snake, twisting tighter and tighter as it inched ever closer to the sleeping figure, then forming itself into a noose and slipping gently around Rod’s throat, tightening suddenly around his windpipe with a terrible snap as it jerked the boy upright in bed, his face contorted in a grotesque mask of frozen agony.

Instead, Nancy and Glen and the two policemen arrived at the cell just in time to find Rod Lane’s lifeless body hanging from the bars of the high window.

“Shit,” said Glen, turning almost as pale as the sheet knotted tightly around Rod’s broken neck.

“Give me a hand,” said Lieutenant Thompson, rushing into the cell to cut the boy down. Together, Glen and the two policemen lowered Rod’s body and arranged it carefully on the unmade cot from which it had been roughly dragged by unseen hands only moments before. Nancy’s father looked at his daughter with an expression halfway between anger and total bewilderment. After all his years on the force, Don Thompson was sure that he knew a potential suicide when he saw one, and Rod Lane hadn’t fit the pattern at all.

“How did you know this was going to happen?” he asked, but Nancy only gazed silently into the darkness.

Despite her parents’ objections, Nancy joined the small crowd of mourners who attended Rod’s funeral later that week. It was a rainy morning, and the mud stuck to Nancy’s shoes as she made her way across the wet ground.

For some reason, she found herself thinking of the staircase at home.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust …"

The minister droned on and on, but nobody seemed to be paying much attention to what he was saying. Rod had never been the sort of boy who attended church, and Nancy doubted that he would have approved of the Bible-quoting minister who now presided over his funeral.

"He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword," said the minister as Nancy spotted Tina's mother in the back of the crowd. Nancy wondered if Mrs. Gray had really believed that it had been Rod's switchblade knife that had brought her daughter's life to such a bloody end.

"… and may Rod Lane rest in peace," the minister concluded. Nancy stepped forward and tossed a handful of dirt into the shallow hole that would be Rod's resting place for eternity.

Or until the worms finish with him, thought Nancy with a grim smile as she watched the casket being lowered into the ground.

"Time to go home," said Marge Thompson, gently taking her daughter by the hand. Nancy looked at her parents, silently noting that it had taken the murder of two of her friends to bring the three of them together again as a family. They walked toward the station wagon in silence, and it was not until Marge opened the door that Nancy finally spoke the thought that had been on her mind ever since she saw Rod's body hanging in the police station cell.

"The killer's still loose, you know."

"What are you talking about?" asked Marge, convinced that a good night's sleep was all Nancy really needed.

"Are you saying somebody else killed Tina?" asked Lieutenant Thompson. He was still trying to figure out how his daughter had forseen Rod's suicide.

Nancy stared off into the distance and shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know who he is," she said. "But he's burned, and he wears a weird hat and a dirty red and green sweater."

"Go on," said Thompson, his face suddenly drained of color.

"And he's got these knives," Nancy continued, "only they're more like some kind of fingernails." She looked at her mother, who had turned as pale as her ex-husband. "And he's trying to kill me, just like he killed Tina and Rod," Nancy added, her voice hoarse and trembling.

"I think you'd better stay home a few days," said the lieutenant in a very low voice. Marge nodded in agreement.

“It won’t do any good,” said Nancy, a weird sort of smile on her face. “I keep dreaming about this guy, just the way Tina did. And probably the way Rod did, too. Tina dreamed he was going to get her, and he did. Now he’s after me.” She paused and looked into her father’s eyes. “Will you find him, Daddy? Please? He’s going to get me if you don’t stop him.”

The lieutenant looked at Marge, cleared his throat, and then looked away. Marge took Nancy in her arms and whispered softly into her ear. “We’re going to help you, baby,” she said. “No one is going to threaten you anymore.”

“Daddy?” said Nancy as her mother ushered her into the front seat of the car and started the engine. She was still looking into her father’s distant eyes as the car slowly pulled away from the cemetery.

The Katja Institute for the Study of Sleep Disorders was a relatively new division of the university’s world-renowned school of medicine. Under the very capable leadership of its young founder and director, Dr. Samuel King, the Institute was quickly achieving well-deserved fame of its own as the front-runner in the rapidly expanding specialty of sleep-related pathologies.

Nancy Thompson was not at all unhappy about finding herself lying on a very comfortable bed in one of the Institute’s carefully designed sleep chambers. Despite the various electrodes and sensors that were fastened to her head and body, Nancy was looking forward to closing her eyes under the watchful gaze of the kind-looking Dr. King and finally getting the sleep that her body so desperately yearned for.

“Don’t worry,” said Dr. King as the nurse finished applying the last of the electrodes. “You’re not going to turn into the Bride of Frankenstein or anything.”

Nancy smiled, hoping that they would soon get to the part of the experiment where she actually got to close her eyes and go to sleep. Dr. King glanced at his clipboard and then turned to Nancy’s mother.

“Did Nancy have any severe childhood illnesses? Scarlet fever? High temperatures? Concussions?”

“No, nothing,” said Marge, sounding almost apologetic.

“He means,” said Nancy, smiling at her mother, “did you ever drop me on my head?” The doctor laughed, but Marge only shook her head as if unaware that Nancy was joking.

“Nightmares are often the natural by-products of psychological trauma,” Dr. King explained, speaking to both Nancy and her mother. “They almost always fade in time.”

“I don’t see why you can’t just give me some kind of pill to keep me

from dreaming," said Nancy. She was beginning to believe that dreamless sleep was the next best thing to paradise.

"We all need to dream," said the doctor. "We've tried depriving volunteers of dreams, and they usually get very, very weird."

"I never used to dream much," said Nancy.

"Everyone dreams every night, whether they remember their dreams or not," Dr. King replied. "We don't know why yet, but dreaming is something we just have to do." The doctor paused, checked his clipboard, and then looked at Nancy again. "I guess we're just about ready to begin."

"We'll be right here," said Marge, squeezing her daughter's hand. "There's nothing to worry about. Please trust us."

"It's not you I don't trust," said Nancy. "It's just …" She stopped in mid-sentence and shrugged. There was no point in trying to explain again. "Let's do it," she said.

Her mother smiled weakly and kissed Nancy one more time before following Dr. King out of the sleep chamber and into the observation room. She gazed at her daughter through the one-way mirror while the doctor checked the readings on a panel of glowing dials and gauges.

"Everything seems perfectly normal so far," he said, making a slight adjustment on one of his instruments. Marge noticed that his manner was a bit more somber now that Nancy was out of earshot. "How long has all this been going on?"

"Since the murder," said Marge. "She was fine before that. Now she seems to think her dreams are, well … real."

"Do you know the old Buddhist tale about the king who dreamed he was a beggar who dreamed he was a king?" asked the doctor, his eyes fixed on Nancy as she began to fall asleep on the other side of the glass. "Half of what our ancestors believed, today we think is utter nonsense. Flat earth. Dragons. Demons. Who's to say that our great-grandchildren won't be laughing at us someday for failing to see that dreams are merely part of some greater reality?" He glanced at Marge for just a second before looking back at his instrument panel. "Good. She's asleep."

"Thank God," said Marge, looking for the first time at the battery of meters, gauges, and graphs that were tracing her daughter's various vital functions while she slept.

"We're monitoring her brain waves with extreme accuracy," said Dr. King, pointing vaguely at one of the lighted dials. "As soon as she starts dreaming, we'll know exactly what's going on."

Marge sat back in her chair and took out a pack of cigarettes. She

noticed Dr. King's disapproving look and put the cigarettes back in her purse.

"What the hell are dreams, anyway?" she asked, largely to divert herself from the powerful nicotine craving.

"Mysteries," said Dr. King. "The truth is, we really don't know what they are or where they come from. As for nightmares …" He paused and shrugged his shoulders. "In any event," he continued, "there seem to be no signs of abnormality in Nancy's EEG or pulse rate. I'd guess that what we have here is a normal young girl who just happens to have gone through a couple of days of hell."

Marge gazed through the window to see Nancy peacefully sleeping, and wondered if maybe she hadn't been making a big fuss over nothing after all.

"Here we go," said Dr. King. Marge looked to where he was pointing and saw a needle move all the way to the left. "She's entering deep sleep now. Her heart rate's a little high, but that's just due to anxiety. This is the phase of sleep where dreams take place." He paused and smiled. "Just about now I feel like I'm monitoring a diver on the bottom of an unmapped sea."

Marge watched as her daughter's face relaxed, the tension gone from her shoulders as she curled into an almost fetus-like ball.

"She's starting to dream now," said the doctor, his eyes glued to the close-up of Nancy's face on the video monitor next to the control panel. "See the rapid eye movements? The eyes actually move to follow action in the dream." He paused, glanced at one of the gauges, and made a note on his pad. "Beta waves are slowing, too. See this graph here?" Marge reluctantly looked away from her daughter's sleeping figure to glance at the slowly moving graph beside the monitor. "Notice how the needle fluctuates between plus and minus three. Those are typical dream parameters. A nightmare might read plus or minus five. Maybe six at the outside. Right now—"

Suddenly, the doctor stopped and tapped the gauge with his finger. Marge looked out and saw Nancy straining to sit up, her neck stretched forward like that of an animal preparing to flee from a predator.

"What's she doing?" Marge demanded, but the doctor was still staring at his instruments in disbelief.

The needle on the graph was reading plus eight and still climbing.

And then a scream of terror penetrated the thick glass, and a dozen red and green lights began to flash on the instrument panel. In the sleep chamber, Nancy's body had arched upward, twisting and turning as if jolted by a massive voltage of electricity.

"Oh my God," cried Marge, but Dr. King was already out the door

and standing at Nancy's side. He grabbed her by the arm and tried to shake her awake, but Nancy continued to scream and flail as if the devil himself were grabbing her arm. Suddenly, her free arm shot forward with incredible force, sending Dr. King crashing into the one-way mirror. The nurse, who was about to join Dr. King in his effort to awaken the girl, decided instead to stand back and wait for further instructions.

It was Marge now who was holding her daughter's shoulders and trying to shake her out of her sleep, but her efforts were futile. Nancy was screaming and cursing, her vicious threats almost as shocking to Marge as the look of terror and fury on the girl's contorted features.

"Nancy!" screamed Marge at the top of her lungs. "It's Mom! It's Mommy!"

And then Nancy was awake. Her eyes open but glazed, she surveyed the room like some cornered animal. Her breathing was fast and shallow, and her face was covered with sweat as if she had been running for her life. She wrapped her arms around her mother and began to cry in a series of gut-wrenching sobs. Slowly, Dr. King approached with a hypodermic needle in his hand.

"This is just going to let you relax and sleep …" he began, but Nancy immediately lashed out with the back of her hand and sent the needle flying against the wall.

"No!" she said, a wild but determined look in her eye. "That's enough sleep."

Dr. King looked into the fire behind her eyes and nodded his head.

"Fair enough," he said, reaching out his hand in a gesture of peace. Nancy hesitated for a moment and then took his hand. Exhausted, she fell back onto the pillow.

That was when Dr. King noticed the bloody gash on Nancy's forearm.

"Get my kit!" the doctor shouted, and the nurse scrambled away.

Nancy looked almost calm now, a smile of victory on her pale white lips as the doctor applied pressure to her bloody wound.

"I brought something out from my dream," she said, reaching beneath the tangled sheets and pulling out a crumpled old fedora hat.

"Where did you get that?" asked Marge, her face as white as her daughter's.

"I grabbed it off his head," said Nancy, feeling calm and in control of her own destiny for the first time in days.

Chapter 7

Marge was leaning against the refrigerator, holding the filthy hat in her hand as she talked to Don Thompson on the telephone.

"She said she snatched it off his head in the dream," Marge explained. She knew how crazy it sounded, and she wasn't surprised when her ex-husband expressed that very thought. "I know it's impossible," she said, "but I'm holding the damned thing in my hand! All I know is—" She stopped abruptly at the sound of Nancy's footsteps on the hall stairs. "Gotta go," said Marge, stuffing the hat into a drawer as she hung up the phone.

Nancy didn't say good morning as she stepped into the kitchen and poured herself a cup of black coffee. Her skin had taken on a pale, almost translucent quality, and her eyes were ringed with dark circles. A streak of gray had appeared overnight in her uncombed hair.

"You didn't sleep again, did you?" said Marge, gazing uneasily at the bloody bandage on her daughter's right arm. Nancy just sighed and sipped the hot coffee. "The doctor says you have to sleep or you'll —"

"Go even crazier?"

"No one thinks you're crazy," said Marge. Nancy looked at her and shrugged as if the question were irrelevant.

"Did you ask Daddy to have the hat examined?"

"That filthy hat?" Marge said, avoiding the girl's eyes. "I threw that thing away yesterday. I don't know what you're trying to prove with it, but—"

"I'm trying to prove what I learned at the dream clinic," said Nancy, her eyes shining with her newfound conviction. "I had it all wrong, Mom. I haven't been dreaming the future at all. I've been dreaming reality. Rod didn't kill Tina. And he didn't hang himself. It's this guy. He's after us in our dreams. First Tina and then Rod. And now he's after me."

Marge shook her head violently from side to side. "That's not reality, Nancy!" she insisted.

"It's real enough for him to cut me," Nancy said, holding out her arm. "Real enough for me to grab his hat and have it in my hand when I woke up."

Marge opened her mouth, but no words came out. There were things she wanted to say, and yet …

“What are you afraid of?” asked Nancy, sensing her mother’s predicament. “What do you know that you’re not telling?”

“I’m not afraid of anything except what’s happening to you,” Marge lied, glancing for just a moment at the drawer near the telephone. Nancy followed her mother’s gaze and suddenly yanked open the drawer.

“Is this real?” Nancy demanded, holding the hat triumphantly in the air. “Is this just something I dreamed about?”

“Give me that damned thing!” demanded Marge, but Nancy was too fast.

“His name is even in it.” Nancy’s heart was pounding as she looked inside the battered hat. “Fred Krueger. Do you know who that is, Mom? You better tell me if you know, because he’s after *me* now!”

“Trust your mother for once,” Marge begged, pouring herself a drink. Nancy knew that her mother had once had a serious drinking problem, but she had been assured time and time again that the problem was under control. Judging by the glazed look in her mother’s eyes, Nancy guessed that the woman had been hitting the bottle pretty hard during the past couple of hours. “You’ll feel better as soon as you get some sleep.”

“Feel better?” Nancy held up her bandaged arm. “You call this feeling better? Or maybe I should just grab that bottle and veg out with you. Get good and loaded—”

Suddenly, Marge reached out and slapped Nancy across the face.

“Damn it,” said Marge, the tears welling up in her eyes as she snatched the hat away from Nancy, “Fred Krueger is dead!”

Nancy stared at her mother in horror.

“You knew about him all along?” she said, more outraged by her mother’s act of betrayal than by her unprecedented physical assault. “You knew who this maniac is, and you kept acting like he was someone I made up?”

“You’re sick, Nancy,” said Marge, turning away to avoid her daughter’s eyes. “You’re imagining things. You just need some sleep, that’s all.”

“Screw sleep!” screamed Nancy, sweeping her injured arm across the table and sending her cup of coffee crashing to the floor. She jumped to her feet, grabbed her jacket from the hook on the wall, and bolted toward the back door.

“Nancy!” Marge shouted, her eyes filled with tears. “It’s just a nightmare, for God’s sake!”

Nancy turned in the doorway and glared at her mother with eyes of rage.

“That’s enough!” she said before slamming the door behind her.

Glen sat on the hood of his red convertible and munched on a Big Mac. The car was parked on the edge of Lookout Drive, the scenic overlook that Glen and Nancy had visited many times in the past to make out while enjoying a spectacular view of the valley below. Today, Glen knew, there would be no making out. Judging by the way Nancy was absorbed in the book she had brought along, Glen doubted that she would even be noticing the view. He took another bite of his sandwich and realized that Nancy was staring at him.

“Whenever I get nervous I eat,” he said.

“Or sleep,” she added.

“I used to,” said Glen. “Not anymore.” There was an awkward pause before he spoke again. “You ever read about the Balinese way of dreaming?”

“No,” said Nancy. She set her book aside and gave the boy her full attention. It was rare that Glen talked about anything besides food, football, or the adolescent male’s physical need for sexual intercourse.

“They got a whole system they call dream skills.” He jumped down from the car to sit on the ground next to Nancy. “Say a person in Bali dreams they’re falling or something. Instead of screaming and getting all upset, they just say, ‘Okay, I’m going to fall, but instead of getting splattered all over the ground, I’m going to fall into a magic world.’ ”

“A magic world?”

“Right. A magic world where you can get something special, like a gift of wisdom or a great song. That’s where they get all their art from. From dreams. They just wake up and write it all down.”

“And what if they meet a monster in their dreams?” asked Nancy. “Then what?”

“They turn their backs on it,” said Glen, beginning to improvise. “That takes away its energy, so it disappears.”

Nancy glanced at her book again, but Glen sensed that she was still thinking about what he had said.

“What happens if they don’t do that?” she asked. “What happens if they don’t turn away in time?”

Glen shrugged. “I guess those people don’t wake up to tell what happened,” he said.

“Thanks a lot,” said Nancy, turning back to her book in earnest.

Glen tipped back the cover of the book and read the title. *“Booby Traps and Improvised Antipersonnel Devices?* Where the hell did you find that?”

“Survivalist bookstore downtown,” said Nancy without looking up from the page.

“Well, how come you’re reading it?” asked Glen.

Nancy looked up thoughtfully. “I’m into survival,” she said.

“You’re starting to scare me,” said Glen, taking another bite of his Big Mac.

I’m starting to scare myself, thought Nancy.

Nancy’s feelings of impending doom grew even stronger an hour later when Glen dropped her off at her house on Elm Street.

Every window in the house had been covered with brand-new iron bars.

“What’s going on around here?” Nancy demanded, finding her mother inside, a bottle of gin clutched tightly in her fist. Marge looked at her daughter for a long time before replying.

“Come down to the cellar with me,” she said.

Nancy followed her mother down the stairs and sat beside her in front of the old furnace.

“All right,” said Marge, looking Nancy squarely in the eye for the first time in days. “You want to know who Fred Krueger was? I’ll tell you. Freddy Krueger was a filthy childkiller who got at least twenty kids before we stopped him. Kids from around here. Kids we all knew. It drove us all crazy when we didn’t know who was doing it, but it was even worse when they caught him.”

“Did they put him away?” Nancy suddenly felt very warm despite the chill in the air.

Marge shook her head.

“Some lawyers got fat and the judge got famous, but someone forgot to sign the search warrant in the right place, and Fred Krueger was free. Just like that.”

“So he’s alive?”

Marge shook her head slowly from side to side.

“A bunch of us parents tracked him down after they let him go. We found him in the old abandoned boiler room, where he used to take his kids …”

“Go on,” said Nancy, flinching at the words “boiler room.”

“He was lying there in that red and green sweater he always wore, drunk as a skunk with those horrible knives on the floor next to him. We poured gasoline all around the place, left a trail out the door …” Marge paused and gazed off into the distance. “Then we lit the whole thing up and watched it burn.”

Nancy stared at the slightly inebriated middle-aged woman sitting beside her and tried to picture her as part of an angry mob taking justice into its own hands. It was not an easy image to conjure up.

“So you see, Nancy,” said Marge, oblivious to her daughter’s thoughts, “you have nothing to worry about. He can’t get you. He’s dead. Mommy killed him.”

She reached into the old furnace and pulled out an object wrapped in rags.

“I even took his knives,” she whispered, unwrapping the horrible bladed glove that Nancy recognized from her dreams.

Nancy stared at the obscene object in her mother’s hand and tried desperately to make sense of things that made no sense. Freddy Krueger was dead, and dead men don’t take revenge on the living. Not even in their worst nightmares.

Then Nancy looked at her arm and saw that her wound had begun to bleed.

Chapter 8

Glen was in bed watching a rerun of his favorite sitcom when the telephone rang.

"Hello?"

"Hi."

"Nancy! How're you doing?"

"Okay. Stand by your window so I can see you. You sound like you're a million miles away."

Glen did as he was told and saw Nancy through the bars on her bedroom window.

"Your mom really went nuts at the security store," he said. "You look like the Prisoner of Zenda or something."

"Thanks," said Nancy.

"How long has it been since you slept?"

"I think it's been seven days. It's okay, though. I checked Guinness, and the record's eleven. I can beat that with my eyes closed." Nancy paused and laughed weakly at her own joke. "Listen, Glen," she said, her voice now deadly serious, "I know who he is."

"Who?"

"The killer."

"You do?"

"Yeah, and if he gets me, I'm pretty sure you'll be next."

"Me?" Suddenly, Glen was taking the whole conversation a lot more seriously. "Why would anyone want to kill me?"

"Don't ask," said Nancy. "Just give me some help nailing this guy when I bring him out."

"Bring him out of what?"

"My dream."

For a moment Glen wondered if his parents weren't onto something when they pointed out that Nancy Thompson was getting very strange lately.

"How are you going to do that?" he said after a long pause.

"Just like I did the hat. Only this time I'll have my hands on the killer when you wake me up."

"Wait a minute," said Glen. "You can't really bring someone out of a dream."

“No problem then,” said Nancy. “If I can’t do it, then everyone can relax, because it’ll just be a simple case of me being nuts.”

“I can save you the trouble,” said Glen with a grin. “You’re nutty as a fruitcake, but I love you anyway.”

“Good. Then you won’t mind coldcocking the guy when I bring him out.”

“What?”

“It’s really simple,” said Nancy. “I grab him in the dream; and when you see me struggling, you wake me up. We both come out, you whack the sucker, and we’ve got him. Clever, huh?”

“Are you crazy? What am I supposed to hit him with?”

“You’re a jock,” said Nancy, sounding slightly annoyed. “You must have a baseball bat or something. Just meet me on my porch at midnight, all right? And whatever you do, don’t fall asleep.”

Glen waited for Nancy to hang up before flopping down on his unmade bed.

“Oh man,” he said out loud, shaking his head slowly from side to side. “Midnight. Baseball bats and bogeymen. Beautiful.”

Several hours later, Glen’s mother went upstairs to say good night to her son. She knocked gently on the bedroom door and called his name. There was no answer.

“Glen? Are you all right?”

Silence.

“Glen, honey?”

She waited a few seconds and then opened the door.

Glen was sprawled across the bed in front of the television set, his eyes shut tight and rock music blaring through his stereo headphones. Mrs. Lantz switched off the television and the stereo before poking Glen gently in the ribs with a loosely clenched fist.

Glen opened his eyes, yawned, and slipped off his headphones.

“How can you watch TV and listen to the stereo at the same time?” asked his mother, smiling fondly at the sleepy teenager.

Glen lazily returned his mother’s smile and swung his long legs over the side of the bed.

“I wasn’t listening to the tube,” he explained. “Just watching. Miss Nude America’s supposed to be on tonight.”

“How are you going to hear what she says?”

“Who cares what she says?”

“Don’t be such a smart guy,” said Mrs. Lantz. She gave the boy a playful swipe with the back of her hand. “You should get to sleep,

Glen. It's almost midnight. God knows we all need our rest after what's been going on around here lately."

"I'll turn in soon, Mom. You and Dad going to sleep now?"

"Pretty soon," she said. "Get to sleep." She kissed the boy good night and left the room.

Glen waited until his mother had closed the bedroom door before turning the TV back on. He glanced at the clock.

Eleven forty-two.

Plenty of time before midnight, he thought, clamping the headphones back on and turning the stereo on loud. Then he lay back to rest his eyes for just a minute before heading off to Nancy's house.

Across the street, a similar scene was being enacted at the Thompson house. Nancy was lying in bed while her mother busily gathered up empty coffee cups and boxes of NoDoz.

"Get some sleep," said Marge, still a little tipsy as she kissed Nancy tenderly on the forehead. "The nightmare's over, honey." Marge glanced at the bars on the bedroom windows and felt strangely comforted. "Everything's going to be all right from now on."

"Okay, Mom," said Nancy, barely able to keep her eyes open.

Marge hesitated for a moment, then picked up the coffeepot from Nancy's night table and turned off the light.

"Night-night," she whispered. Nancy closed her eyes and pulled the blanket up over her shoulders as her mother tiptoed out of the room and closed the door quietly behind her.

Five seconds later, Nancy's eyes snapped open.

She jumped out of bed and took several deep breaths to fight off the sleep that felt like some powerful physical entity trying to envelop her. Reaching under her night table, she found the full pot of coffee that she had stashed there earlier and poured some into the large mug she had hidden beneath her pillow. She rapidly drained the cup and then stepped over to the window. She opened it, pressed her face against the bars, and sucked in the cool night air.

At that moment, Glen's father was standing on his porch, smoking one last cigarette before turning in for the night. He glanced up at Nancy's bedroom window and saw the girl's pale face just before she pulled down the shade.

"You really shouldn't stare," said Mrs. Lantz. Her husband crushed the cigarette butt under his shoe.

"If you ask me," he said, still staring at the Thompson house, "that

kid is some kind of lunatic."

"You know you don't mean that," said Mrs. Lantz. "If you mean the bars, that's just Marge being extra cautious. You know how jumpy she's been since Don moved out. Besides, with Nancy acting so nervous lately—"

"All I know," her husband interrupted, "is I don't want that strange girl hanging around with our boy anymore."

"Come to bed," said Mrs. Lantz. She took her husband by the hand and pulled him gently toward the house. "It's almost midnight."

Nancy looked at the clock on her night table and wondered what the hell was keeping Glen.

Across the street, Glen was fast asleep, the headphones blasting loud music in his ears while the television flickered its colored lights in his face. He slept right through Miss Nude America and never even heard the telephone ring.

Downstairs, his father had just turned off the lights.

"Who the hell could be calling at this hour?" he demanded as his wife lifted the receiver to find out.

"Hello? … Hold on." She covered the mouthpiece. "It's *her,"* she whispered. "She wants to speak to Glen."

"About what?" asked Mr. Lantz, sounding very annoyed as he glanced at his watch.

"What's this about, Nancy?" Mrs. Lantz asked. She listened for a moment and then covered the mouthpiece with her hand again. "She says it's private. Very private and very important."

"Give me that," said Mr. Lantz, grabbing the receiver from his wife. "Glen's asleep," he said. "Talk to him tomorrow." Without waiting for a reply, he slammed down the telephone. "You have to be firm with kids," he told his wife. He glanced back at the phone and then took the receiver off the hook for good measure. "Let's get some sleep," he said, feeling really in control for the first time that day.

Nancy dialed Glen's number again and got a busy signal.

"Please don't be asleep," she whispered, staring helplessly out the window.

Then the phone rang and Nancy snatched it up.

"Glen?"

But all she heard was the horrible screeching sound of metal

scraping against metal.

Nancy slammed the phone down, a pulse now throbbing in her temples. In anger and frustration, she yanked hard on the phone, ripping it out of the wall.

Brilliant, she thought, picking the phone up and dropping the useless instrument on her bed. *Now what if Glen tries to call?* She stepped over to the window and stared helplessly at the house across the street.

And then the phone rang again.

Nancy whirled around and stared as the disconnected telephone rang a second time. Slowly, almost as though she were moving through water, Nancy reached out her hand and picked up the receiver.

"Hello?" she said.

"I'm your boyfriend now, Nancy," said the triumphant voice of Fred Krueger.

Before Nancy could say a word, the mouthpiece of the telephone suddenly turned into a mouth, its long, snaky tongue darting out and insinuating itself disgustingly between Nancy's parted lips.

Nancy threw the phone down, smashing it into the wall. She stared at the obscene instrument in horror, still tasting the foul tongue in her mouth.

And suddenly, the meaning of Fred Krueger's strange message became clear to her.

"Glen!" she screamed, running out of her room and down the stairs to the front door.

"Locked!" said her mother's slurred voice from the living room couch. "Locked, locked, locked. I locked it all up." There was a drunken smile on Marge's face. "You're going to sleep tonight if it kills you."

"Give me the key, Mother," said Nancy, knowing even as she spoke that it was already too late.

"Forget it." Marge took another swallow from the bottle at her side. "I don't even have it on me."

There was no time to argue. Nancy ran to the back door. Locked! She tried each of the locked windows, shaking the bars in frustration and fury, but it was no use.

Nancy was a prisoner in her own house, and there was no way to warn Glen that the bogeyman was on his way.

In his dream, Glen thought he heard Nancy call his name. He had a vague notion of getting up and finding out what she wanted, but

appearing on the “Tonight” show and meeting Miss Nude America was a much more interesting prospect. He lay back on the sofa in the green room and waited patiently for Johnny Carson to introduce him.

Glen never noticed that the bed had begun to shake or that a foul aroma had begun to permeate the bedroom air. Had he been a lighter sleeper, Glen might have woken up when Freddy’s powerful arms first shot up from beneath the covers, grabbed him tight, and pulled him deep into the bed, the stereo and the TV following close behind. Instead, Glen continued to sleep as he clawed desperately at his blanket and sheets, trying with what little strength he had left to keep from being pulled still deeper into the abyss. But his efforts were too feeble and much too late. By the time Glen began to struggle in earnest, the deadly blades of Freddy Krueger had already hacked and sliced their way through half a dozen of his vital organs.

There was a moment of stillness, and then the bed began to bubble and gurgle like some obscene volcano about to erupt. Suddenly, a geyser of blood shot into the air, covering the walls and ceiling as the lifeless remains of Glen Lantz were vomited up from the center of the bed, a sickening mess of guts and brains and bones and shredded flesh streaming over the edge like a river of gore. And then, when there was nothing left of Glen to continue the dream, the pit in the middle of the bed closed up as if it had never been there at all.

Mrs. Lantz walked in a minute later to bring Glen a fresh pillowcase.

Even from across the street, Nancy could hear Mrs. Lantz’s anguished scream. Nancy was looking out the window when the ambulance and the police cars arrived. She saw her father climb out of the unmarked car that screeched to a halt in front of Glen’s house and waved to him from behind the bars. He returned the wave quickly and then hurried into the Lantz House. Nancy pulled down the window shade, went downstairs, and dialed Glen’s number.

Chapter 9

Lt. Don Thompson was standing in the Lantz living room a few minutes after midnight when the telephone rang.

"It's your daughter, Lieutenant," said Parker. "She says its urgent."

A look of annoyance passed over Thompson's face.

"Tell her I'm not here," he said, watching the coroner head upstairs.

"She saw you a minute ago," said Parker, his hand covering the mouthpiece.

The lieutenant shrugged his broad shoulders and reached for the telephone.

"Hi, honey."

"I know what happened," she said, her voice strangely calm.

"Then you know more than I do. I haven't even been upstairs."

"You know he's dead, though. Right?"

The lieutenant paused a moment and watched one of the uniformed men position a bucket in the middle of the living room floor. He looked up and saw blood dripping through the ceiling.

"Yeah, apparently he's dead. How the hell did you know?"

"Listen carefully," said Nancy, ignoring her father's question. "I've got a proposition for you."

"Go ahead," he said, only half listening as he watched the blood slowly drip into the bucket.

"I'm going to get the guy who did it," said Nancy. "I'm going to get him and bring him to you. All you have to do is be there to arrest him. Okay?"

"You don't have to do anything, baby," said the lieutenant. He wondered if the breakup of his marriage had had anything to do with his daughter's mental collapse. "Just tell me who did it and I'll go get him."

"Fred Krueger did it, Daddy, and I'm the only one who can get him. Just come over here in exactly twenty minutes and break down the door. Can you do that?"

"Sure, but—"

"Half past midnight," said Nancy, glancing at her wrist-watch. "That should be enough time for me to fall asleep and find him."

"Okay, honey," said Thompson, wondering why in the hell Marge had decided to tell Nancy about Fred Krueger at a time like this. "You

just get yourself some sleep, and everything will be all right."

"And you'll be here to catch him, right?"

Before the lieutenant could reply, Parker appeared at the head of the stairs and reminded him that the coroner was waiting.

"Don't worry, honey," he told Nancy, nodding to Parker. "I'll be there. You just get yourself some rest. Deal?"

"Deal," said Nancy.

"I love you, sweetheart." Thompson hung up the phone and began to head up the stairs. Suddenly he stopped and turned to Parker. "Go outside and watch my daughter's house," he said. "If you see anything funny, let me know."

"What do you mean, 'funny'?"

"I don't know," said the lieutenant, suddenly feeling a little foolish. "One thing's for sure: I don't want Nancy coming over here. She's too far gone to be able to handle anything like this."

I wish to God I didn't have to handle it myself, he thought as he quickly climbed the stairs.

Across the street, Nancy was hard at work preparing to do battle. With her survival manual at her side, she began quickly to construct the weapons she would need to fight Freddy Krueger. Her hands were surprisingly steady as she carefully strung piano wire across the living room, filled a light bulb with powder from shotgun shells that Glen had swiped from his father's gun case, and hinged the sledgehammer she had found in the cellar to a trigger mechanism over her bedroom door. Then, when she was finished setting her homemade booby traps, Nancy went upstairs and peeked into her mother's bedroom.

Marge was lying in bed, the half-empty bottle of gin still at her side.

"I guess I shouldn't have done it," she said, looking sadly at Nancy.

"Just sleep now, Mom." Nancy sat at her mother's side and took hold of her hand.

"I just wanted to protect you," said Marge. "I didn't see how much you needed to know. You face things. That's your nature. That's your gift." Marge paused and looked at the bottle at her side. "But sometimes you have to turn away too," she concluded with a shrug of her slender shoulders.

"I love you, Mom," said Nancy.

"I love you, too," said Marge.

Nancy pulled the covers up over her mother's shoulders and tiptoed out of the room. She went into her own room, crawled into bed, and set the alarm on her wristwatch to go off at exactly twelve-thirty.

“Okay, Krueger,” she said as she closed her eyes. “We play on your court.”

Nancy was rummaging through the old furnace in the cellar. She pulled out the bundle of rags in which her mother had saved Freddy’s glove and carefully unwrapped it.

As she expected, the glove was gone.

Nancy looked behind the furnace and noticed a door that she had never seen before. With only a moment’s hesitation, she opened the door and began to descend the long staircase. She was startled when the door slammed shut behind her, but she knew that it would ultimately make no difference.

Closed doors have no meaning in the world of dreams.

Then she reached the bottom of the stairs and found herself once more in the vast boiler room. Nancy walked down the narrow passageway, the adrenaline pumping through her system, filling her with a sense of purpose that almost transcended her terror.

“Krueger!” she screamed. “I’m here!”

She continued along a series of treacherous catwalks, carefully avoiding the scalding hot pipes that surrounded her on all sides. It wasn’t time to wake up yet.

She paused a moment to catch her breath and noticed a familiar object.

Tina’s crucifix.

She examined the crucifix for a moment and then continued her descent down a seemingly endless procession of ladders that brought her ever closer to the great roaring fire below. She was only a few yards from the fierce orange blaze when she almost stepped on Glen’s partially melted headphones.

“Come out and show yourself, you bastard!” she shouted, her voice now indisputably that of the hunter and not the hunted.

And then Freddy showed himself, more hideous than ever before with his head uncovered, his horribly scarred face transformed by the unspeakable hatred he felt for the girl who had dared to challenge his power. Without a moment’s hesitation, he lashed out with his razor-sharp finger-knives, but this time Nancy was ready for him. She stepped back into the darkness, strangely confident that no harm could come to her as long as she avoided Freddy’s deadly blades.

She was falling now, but the scenery had abruptly changed. She crashed to the ground, no longer in the dank boiler room but on her own front lawn. Nancy scrambled to her feet, knowing that if this had not been a dream every bone in her body would have been crushed by

the fall. Breathing the fresh night air, she ran toward the front door, eager to get back to the safety of her own bed.

And then Krueger was behind her, an obscene chuckle of triumph welling up from somewhere deep in his throat. He swiped at Nancy with his blades, certain that she would be unable to open the door before feeling the wrath of his deadly glove. But Nancy attempted neither to open the door nor to flee from her attacker. Instead, she threw herself forward, grasping Freddy around the middle and knocking him over on his back as she deftly avoided his lethal right hand.

Then the alarm went off and Nancy woke up.

Still shaking and breathless, she looked around, almost disappointed not to find the man in the filthy sweater lying beside her in the bed. Of course she was glad to have escaped, but Nancy knew that the nightmares would not end until she finally succeeded in bringing Fred Krueger out of her dream.

Bring him out of my dream? she thought, hearing as if for the first time the absurdity of the idea. “I guess maybe I am crazy after all,” she said aloud, remembering her last conversation with Glen.

Then Fred Krueger leaped at her from the side of the bed with an explosive scream of rage.

Nancy rolled off the bed in time to avoid Freddy’s claw and darted to the window. Searching desperately for a weapon, she grabbed her coffeepot and brought it crashing down on his head. He was still bellowing with rage as she dashed through the door and threw the outside bolt. Stopping for just a second to attach the string from the sledgehammer to the bedroom doorknob, Nancy raced downstairs and headed for the front door. Locked! She smashed the glass window and began screaming for help.

Upstairs, the enraged madman had already discovered that walking through locked doors was no easy task outside of the world of dreams. His shoulders were strong, however, and it did not take him long to break the feeble latch that held shut Nancy’s bedroom door. He threw the door open and stepped boldly out of the room. Instantly, he was struck hard in the chest by the full force of a twenty-pound sledgehammer. Bellowing with pain and anger, Freddy stumbled out into the hallway and tripped over the fishing line Nancy had strung across the top of the staircase. He came crashing down the stairs, sprawling at Nancy’s feet as she continued to scream for help through the broken window.

And then Freddy was on his feet again and Nancy was running to

the living room, mocking and taunting the furious madman from behind the couch.

"I'm gonna split you in two," Freddy croaked, enraged by Nancy's courage and audacity. He took a step toward her, his finger-knives held high, and tripped over the wire attached to the lamp in which Nancy had placed the powder-filled light bulb. As Freddie stumbled, the circuit was completed and a loud explosion sent him flying across the room. He lay on the floor, too stunned to move, while Nancy raced back to the front door.

"Help!" she screamed. "I've got him trapped! Daddy, where are you?"

Jerry Parker looked at the girl from across the street and waved reassuringly to her.

"Everything's under control!" he shouted.

"Get my father, you asshole!" Nancy shouted back, her outrage momentarily overtaking her fear. For a moment, she felt as if she had more control over the monstrous Freddy Krueger than she did over the moronic police officer across the street.

Parker looked at the girl and then glanced at the house behind him. The last thing he needed was to have the lieutenant on his case. Better safe than sorry, he thought as he went inside to report that Lieutenant Thompson's daughter was asking for him.

Meanwhile, Freddy was back on his feet and in hot pursuit of the girl who had dared to defy him. Nancy fled to the cellar with Freddy only a few steps behind. Following the plan she had worked out in advance, Nancy hid behind the furnace and waited until Freddy's back was turned. Then she picked up the bottle of gasoline she had left on the steps and called his name.

Freddy turned around, and Nancy doused him with the highly flammable liquid.

"No!" screamed Freddy in horror as Nancy ignited an entire box of kitchen matches and threw the flaming box in his direction. It was too late to duck. Instantly, Freddy was enveloped in flame, screaming in an agony that he had not felt since that horrible day ten years before when he vowed to take his revenge on the people of Springwood.

Nancy reached the top of the cellar stairs and stationed herself behind the door just seconds before the flaming madman started to follow. He was about to pull open the door when Nancy suddenly pushed it forward with all her strength, knocking him down the stairs with a terrible crash. She barely had enough time to throw the dead bolt on the cellar door before she heard Freddy charging back up the stairs.

She arrived at the front door just as her father stepped out onto

Glen's porch across the street.

"Daddy!" she screamed. "I did it! Please hurry!"

Lieutenant Thompson saw the look of urgency on his daughter's face and called to a few of the uniformed patrolmen for help. Together, the men quickly broke down the locked door and rushed into the house. Nancy threw herself into her father's arms as Parker and the others raced toward the smoking cellar.

"What the hell is going on?" asked the lieutenant. Nancy was about to explain when she noticed the trail of flaming footsteps that led from the cellar door, across the living room carpet, and up the front stairs.

"He's after Mother!" Nancy shouted, dashing up the stairs with her father close behind. She arrived at Marge's bedroom to find her mother pinned to the bed by the still flaming Freddy Krueger!

Without a moment's hesitation, Nancy picked up a chair and brought it crashing down over the fiery monster's head. Freddy fell to one side just as the lieutenant entered the room and threw a heavy blanket over the burning bed.

"Watch it!" screamed Nancy. "He's under there!"

Immediately, the lieutenant yanked the top cover off the bed. The fire was out, but the bed continued to glow with an eerie reddish light. In its center lay the charred corpse of Marge Thompson, smoking and seething as it sank slowly into the mattress, its gnarled and blackened hand waving a gruesome farewell.

Then the glow faded, and the hole that had become Marge's eternal grave closed up forever.

"Now do you believe me?" asked Nancy, a strange calm descending on her as she looked her father in the eye. Before the lieutenant could reply, Parker burst in to report that the fire downstairs was under control. Don Thompson looked at his daughter but could find no words to express what he was feeling.

"I'm okay," she said, knowing that the nightmare was rapidly approaching its inevitable end. "You go downstairs. I'll be there in a minute."

The lieutenant hesitated for a moment and then left the room, closing the door behind him. Nancy turned her back to the bed and waited.

Slowly, the figure of Fred Krueger rose ghostlike from the center of the mattress.

"I know you're there, Freddy," said Nancy, turning to face the charred monster.

"You thought you was going to get away from me?" he croaked, surprised by the calmness of her voice.

“I know you too well now, Freddy,” Nancy replied.

Freddy grinned, confident that the chase was over at last.

“And now you die,” he said, his gleaming steel talons poised to strike one more time.

But Nancy just looked at him and shook her head.

“It’s too late, Krueger. I know the secret now. This is just a dream. You’re not alive. It’s only a dream.” She paused to let her words sink in and then took a deep breath. “I want my mother and my friends again,” she said.

“You *what?”* the madman bellowed.

“I take back every bit of energy I ever gave you,” said Nancy quietly, turning her back on Fred Krueger for the last time as she walked slowly toward the bedroom door. “You’re nothing, Krueger,” she said calmly. “You’re shit!”

Freddy stepped behind her, his finger-knives bunched together and poised over the back of her neck.

Nancy took another deep breath and reached for the doorknob as the deadly steel talons began to come down.

And then …

Chapter 10

And then it was morning.

Nancy stepped outside into a beautiful new day and squinted at the blinding sunlight.

"God, it's bright," she said, shading her eyes with her hand.

"It's going to burn off soon," said Marge Thompson, stepping out of the house right behind her daughter. "Otherwise it wouldn't be so bright. The sun's just trying hard."

Nancy looked at her mother and smiled. She had a vague sense of something having been wrong the night before, but it was impossible to think about unpleasant things on a magnificent morning like this.

"Feeling better?" Nancy asked.

"I feel like a million bucks," said her mother, and Nancy thought she looked it. "They say you've bottomed out when you can't remember the night before." She paused and slowly nodded her head as if making an important decision. "No more drinking for me, baby. I just don't seem to feel like it anymore." She turned and looked at Nancy. "I kept you up last night, didn't I? You look a little peaked."

"I guess I just slept heavy," said Nancy, vaguely recalling some unpleasant dream that might have disturbed her sleep.

Before she could give the matter any more thought, however, a red convertible with its top down pulled up to the curb in front of the house. Glen Lantz was at the wheel as usual, while Tina Gray and Rod Lane held hands in the backseat.

"You believe this fog?" Glen called out to Nancy's mother as Nancy climbed into the front seat of the convertible.

"I believe anything's possible," said Marge with a cheerful laugh as she waved good-bye to Nancy and her friends.

Glen was about to drive off when the top of the convertible suddenly clamped down like a sprung trap.

"What are you doing?" asked Rod.

"I'm not doing anything," said Glen, and it was true.

It wasn't he who had closed the top.

Or shut all the windows.

Or locked all the doors.

Or painted the weird red and green stripes on the convertible top.

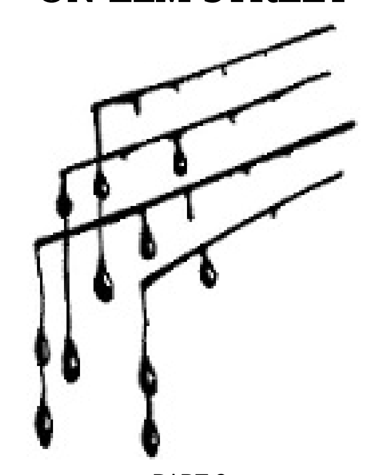
"Mother!" screamed Nancy, but Marge never heard her daughter's

screams of terror as the demon automobile drove itself away and disappeared into the fog.

Nancy's mother was still smiling and waving from the doorway when a talon-tipped hand suddenly shattered the glass window behind her, grabbed Marge by the throat, and yanked her back into the house with superhuman strength.

Perhaps it wasn't going to be such a wonderful day on Elm Street after all.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET



PART 2:

Freddy's Revenge

A novel by Jeffrey Cooper

Based on the screenplay by David Chaskin

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Written by DAVID CHASKIN

Produced by ROBERT SHAYE

Directed by JACK SHOLDER

Chapter 1

Jesse Walsh had only been living in the old house on Elm Street for a few weeks when the nightmares began.

It seemed to Jesse that he was much too happy with his life to be having such spooky dreams. Admittedly, he hadn't been too pleased at first to learn that his father was being transferred to a branch office in the suburbs. Jesse was a city kid and proud of it. After seventeen years learning how to cope with life on the mean urban streets, Jesse wasn't sure he was ready to deal with a bunch of rich kids who had never been into anything heavier than hanging out at the local shopping mall.

Much to his surprise, however, Springwood had turned out to be a pretty nice place to live. Living on a clean and quiet street in a virtually crime-free neighborhood was a refreshing change from life in the big city, and leaving the house each morning with no expectation of being beaten up or robbed on the way to school was something Jesse thought he could very easily learn to live with. Even the kids at school were turning out to be a lot hipper than he had expected. It might take some time, but Jesse knew that he would eventually find his niche in the complex social structure of Springwood High.

In the meantime, of course, there was Lisa Poletti. Whenever things started getting him down, all Jesse had to do was think about Lisa and all his troubles seemed to disappear. The day he met Lisa Poletti, Jesse knew that life in Springwood was going to be just fine after all.

All things considered, Jesse Walsh would have been about as contented as a teenage boy could be if it weren't for those godawful nightmares.

The nightmare he had had that morning was fairly typical. The dream started innocently enough, with Jesse riding the bus home from school. It was a beautiful spring day, and everyone on the bus was glad that another week of school had come to an end. Even Joe the bus driver was in too good a mood to yell at the kid blasting the radio in the back of the bus. Joe never talked much—except to yell at somebody for breaking one of the rules—but he always seemed like a nice enough old guy, and most of the kids wished him a good weekend as they got off the bus.

By the time the bus reached Jesse's part of town, there was no one left on board except Jesse, the driver, and a couple of giggly girls. Jesse squirmed uncomfortably in his seat as one of the girls looked at

him and whispered something to her friend. Then the two girls broke out in uproarious laughter, and Jesse felt his face flush. It suddenly grew very warm on the bus and Jesse tried opening a window. The window refused to budge. He would have tried another window, but he already felt as if he were attracting more than his fair share of attention.

He looked out the window and saw the mother and kid brother of one of the girls waiting at the side of the curb. The girl stood up, waved good-bye to her friend, and walked toward the front of the bus. She was almost at the door when the bus suddenly sped up and shot past the intersection.

"Hey!" shouted the girl. "That was my stop!"

But the bus driver paid no attention.

In fact, the bus seemed to be going even faster now, almost knocking the girl off her feet as it sharply turned the next corner.

"Hey, Joe!" cried the second girl. "Let us off!"

If the driver heard, he made no sign of acknowledgement. Jesse looked out the window and noticed that the weather had undergone a drastic change. The sun that shone so brilliantly just moments ago had completely disappeared. Instead, threatening clouds filled the sky and a wicked wind was whipping the trees into a frenzy.

The bus had passed the last of the houses now and was headed into open terrain at a startling speed. One of the girls had begun to cry as her friend made her way to the front of the bus, struggling to keep her balance as the vehicle hurtled along the bumpy road. The girl was only a few feet from the driver when he stuck out his arm to throw the shift into high gear. She stopped cold when she saw that his sleeve was charred and smoking.

From the back of the bus, Jesse could see the strange glove he wore, its razor-sharp talons gleaming in the darkness.

And then the bus swerved wildly, throwing its passengers onto the floor. Lightning flashed, and the sky had turned black as night. Thick clouds of steam poured out from under the hood of the bus as it crashed wildly through a wall of overgrown brambles on the side of the road. All hell broke loose as the bus hurtled over rocks and through ditches, leaving a trail of toppled trees in its fearsome wake. Skidding wildly across the desert landscape, the bus began to rumble and shake as if the solid earth below were about to explode. Jesse looked out the window just as the front wheel smashed into a jagged boulder and snapped off the axle. He held on for dear life as the smoke-filled bus rocked violently from side to side before bouncing to a bone-shaking halt.

Slowly, Jesse and the two girls lifted themselves up off the floor.

The temperature in the smoky bus was well over a hundred degrees, and it was almost impossible to breathe the stifling air. Every door and window was still locked tight.

And then the ground beneath the bus began to split apart as if the planet itself were opening at the seams. Huge chunks of land crumbled inward and toppled to oblivion, leaving the bus to teeter precariously on a narrow stone platform surrounded by nothing but a steamy abyss.

Jesse smelled something burning. He looked to the front of the bus and saw that the dashboard was on fire, thick black clouds of smoke billowing to the ceiling. Then he saw the man who had been driving the bus lurch toward him, and he knew that the creature in the filthy red and green sweater was definitely not Joe the bus driver. Smoke rose from his body as if he himself had recently been on fire, and Jesse thought he saw hot globs of molten flesh dripping off the man's charred skin.

And as the man walked toward the terrified passengers, his finger-knives swept along the seats, leaving deep gashes in the green vinyl upholstery. Jesse knew he would never forget the horrible sound of metal scraping against metal as the horrible blades screeched against the ceiling and the steel support poles.

The three teenagers shared one common desire now, and that desire was to escape from the madman in the dirty sweater. Desperately they raced from window to window, but every window was locked. One of the girls yanked hard on the emergency-door lever and watched helplessly as the lever came loose in her hand.

And then the driver stood before her, his awful taloned glove raised high. Jesse could see the man's horribly scarred face beneath his battered fedora hat, and he knew in that instant that the man wouldn't stop until everyone on the bus was as dead as he was.

There was no way out, and Jesse knew it.

No way out, that is, until his alarm clock went off and he woke up screaming as he had so many mornings before.

"Why can't Jesse wake up like everybody else?" asked his kid sister at the breakfast table that morning. Angela was eleven years old and had never had a nightmare in her life. Having her big brother wake up with a scream of terror every morning was definitely starting to get on her nerves.

"Good morning," Jesse mumbled, joining his family at the breakfast table a few minutes later.

"Good morning, honey." Despite her cheerful greeting, there was an

unmistakable look of concern on Shirley Walsh's expressive face. Jesse's mother was the only one in the family besides Jesse himself who seemed to be taking the nightmares seriously. His sister had no idea why her big brother was acting so weird, and his father was of the firmly held belief that the boy was much too old to be making such a big fuss over a couple of bad dreams.

"You got your room straightened out yet?" asked Ken Walsh that morning. Jesse's father was a practical man who believed in practical solutions to life's little problems. He had never been reluctant to express his opinions about anything, and it was his often-expressed opinion that the only thing wrong with Jesse was that he was a lazy kid who had been spoiled all his life by an over-indulgent mother.

"It's getting there," said Jesse in answer to his father's question. It was the same answer he had given to the same question every day for the past month. In point of fact, Jesse's room was still cluttered with half-unpacked boxes of junk that he had to carefully circumnavigate every time he tried weaving his way in or out of the room.

"We've only been living here six weeks now," said his father, pointing at the boy with his fork. "I want that room unpacked by tomorrow night."

Jesse nodded and yawned.

"Would you like some eggs, Jesse?" asked his mother as she slid another panful of scrambled eggs onto her husband's plate. Jesse was about to reply when his mother noticed that Angela had thrust her hand deep into the box of breakfast cereal. "What are you doing, dear?" she asked.

"I'm trying to get the Fu-Man Fingers," the girl replied, spilling Fu-Man Chews all over the kitchen table.

Jesse glanced at the cereal box and saw a cartoon of the evil oriental villain pointing at a bowl of cereal with one of his long, pointed fingernails. Above the cartoon was the caption FREE INSIDE: FU-MAN FINGERS. He gazed at the drawing of a hand wearing several of the long red plastic fingernails and felt himself shudder.

"Jesse?"

He looked away from the cereal box and made a conscious effort to give his mother his full attention.

"Eggs?" she said.

Jesse glanced at the drawing on the cereal box for another second and then shook his head.

"No thanks, Mom," he said, wondering what it was about that picture that made him feel so uneasy. "I'll just have some milk."

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," said Jesse. "Just a little warm, I guess. It's really hot upstairs."

"I know," said his mother, looking pointedly at her husband. "I wish you'd call someone to check out the air conditioning, Ken."

Ken Walsh sat up straight in his chair, a butter knife clenched tightly in his hand as if he were preparing to do battle.

"I know what's wrong with the air conditioning," he insisted. "Just needs a shot of Freon is all."

"Uh-oh," said Jesse, a grin on his face. "Dad's fixing something again. Everybody hit the deck!"

"Don't be a smart ass," said his father. Jesse caught his mother's disapproving look and tried hard not to laugh.

"So," said his mother, eager to change the subject, "is school going all right?"

"Okay, I guess," said Jesse with a shrug.

"Making friends?"

"You know how it is," he replied. Parents always asked how things were going at school, he thought, but you could never talk to them about the things that really mattered.

The doorbell rang just as Angela managed to yank out a bagful of Fu-Man Fingers along with half a box of Fu-Man Chews cereal.

"That's Lisa," said Jesse, jumping out of his seat and grabbing his jacket off the hook near the front door. "I better get going."

"Who's Lisa?" asked his father, but the question went unanswered. Jesse was already out the door.

"Your timing was perfect," Jesse told Lisa as they walked briskly toward his beat-up old Falcon. "I was getting the third degree in there."

"How come?"

"No reason," said Jesse with a shrug. He opened the car door and the girl got in.

Lisa smiled as she watched Jesse walk around to the driver's side of the car. Jesse was different from the other boys in Springwood. Lisa wasn't sure what about him was so special, but there was definitely something about Jesse Walsh that set him apart from any boy she had ever gone out with before. *Not that we're really going out yet,* Lisa reminded herself. Jesse had struck up a conversation with her in the cafeteria last month and found out that she lived on the other end of Elm Street. He offered her a ride to school the next morning, and they had been traveling together ever since. It was true that he hadn't asked her out yet, but Lisa knew it was just a matter of time. There was something about this new boy that she really liked, and she was

pretty sure that the feeling was mutual.

As much as Lisa liked Jesse, however, she had to admit that his Falcon was not the most elegant automobile she had ever ridden in. As a matter of fact, she had never seen such a battered and makeshift car before in her whole life. The body of the car was almost as much rust as metal, and the stuffing that stuck up through the front seat inside was barely held in by the cheap tape that covered most of the ripped-up vinyl upholstery. The dashboard was cracked and peeling, with gaping holes where the radio and the glove compartment used to be. In lieu of state-of-the-art stereo equipment, a cheap AM transistor radio was hung by its wrist strap like a good-luck charm from the rearview mirror.

Lisa was beginning to love the old heap almost as much as Jesse did.

Jesse climbed into the driver's seat. He pulled a couple of bare wires out from under the dash and twisted them together.

"Aren't you afraid somebody could steal your car like that?" asked Lisa.

"Are you kidding?" said Jesse, turning to the girl with a big smile on his face. *"This* car?"

He flicked on a toggle switch that stuck out through a crudely drilled hole in the dash and then pushed the button next to it. Slowly, the starter began to turn over.

"Contact," said Jesse, giving a thumbs-up signal. The engine loudly backfired and then roared to life. He threw the wobbly gearshift into first and stepped on the accelerator as the car began slowly to buck and rumble its way up the street.

Jesse glanced at Lisa Poletti and broke into a grin. Bad dreams or no bad dreams, life in Springwood was looking very good indeed.

Ken Walsh was also feeling very pleased with life in the suburbs that morning. Floating on a foam chair in the middle of his small backyard pool, he sipped his coffee and took a deep breath of the fresh morning air.

"Ken," said his wife, stepping out the back door and glancing at her wristwatch, "shouldn't you be getting to the office? It's almost nine o'clock."

"As soon as I finish my coffee," he said. "I'm enjoying my pool right now." He paused and took a sip of his wife's excellent coffee. "I love our new house. Don't you?"

"Of course I do," she said, but the look on her face told him that something wasn't quite right.

“What’s the problem, Shirl?”

“I’ll just be a lot happier when you finish taking down those bars,” she said.

Ken looked at the old house and nodded. It was hard to imagine why anyone would put heavy iron bars on every window and door in this lovely old house on Elm Street.

Chapter 2

Lisa was glad she had phys ed the same time as Jesse.

Not that she liked the class or her teacher. Lisa did not happen to share Mrs. Dorfman's archaic notion that archery was an essential element of every girl's physical education. Standing outside in her goofy gym suit and shooting arrows at some dumb target was not Lisa's idea of a good time, but at least it gave her the opportunity to watch Jesse and the other boys play softball at the other end of the athletic field. Lisa knew that Jesse really enjoyed softball and looked forward to gym each day, but she liked to think that their friendly exchange of smiles and waves during seventh period every day meant almost as much to him as throwing that big ball around and sliding in the mud.

"He make any moves yet?"

Lisa turned to the girl standing next to her and shrugged. "I've only known him a few weeks," she told her friend Kerry. Sometimes it was hard to believe that she and Jesse had only met a month ago. As she looked at him now—standing at second base and staring intently at the batter—she couldn't help feeling as if she had known the boy her whole life.

"Personally," said Kerry, "I think that boy needs a push start." Lisa laughed. She knew that Kerry had gone pretty far pretty fast with a lot of boys, but that just wasn't Lisa's style. Lisa was glad that Jesse wasn't pushing for anything more physical yet. They were still getting to know each other, and for now it was kind of nice just having him as a good friend. Lisa wondered why things always seemed to get so complicated once you started treating a boy as something more than a friend.

Lisa had just slipped an arrow into her bow when she heard the crack of a ball against a bat on the other side of the field. She glanced over to home plate and saw that Ron Grady had just sent the ball flying over the pitcher's head toward second base. She looked over to where Jesse stood and saw that he had chosen that inopportune moment to smile at her and wave.

"Jesse!" she cried, but it was too late. The ball grazed him on the side of the head, and Jesse tumbled to the ground.

Immediately, Jesse's teammates were at his side and helping him to his feet. He waved them away, more embarrassed than hurt, and

glanced over at Lisa to see if she had witnessed his fall. The girl smiled at him and shrugged.

"You okay?" asked Coach Schneider, jogging over from his umpire's position behind home plate.

"I'm fine," said Jesse. Schneider was an ex-Marine and a real hard character. Jesse had decided from the very beginning to do everything he could to stay on Coach Schneider's good side.

Assuming, of course, that Coach Schneider had a good side.

"Well, pay attention next time!" shouted the coach, jogging back across the diamond.

Jesse resumed his position at second base and found himself looking into the sneering face of Ron Grady.

"Maybe you ought to try something a little more your speed, Walsh," said Grady, taking a few steps toward third base. "Like knitting."

"Knit this, Grady." Jesse stuck out his tongue and gave Grady a particularly juicy Bronx cheer.

Grady responded by grabbing his own crotch and making the appropriate obscene gesture. Jesse replied with an Italian salute, slapping one hand into the crook of his arm and throwing up his middle finger for good measure. Grady was about to return the compliment when his teammate slammed a line drive into left field. Grady broke for third, but was greeted by the third baseman, who now held the ball in his mitt. Grady turned and headed back for second just as the ball snapped into Jesse's outstretched glove. He turned again, running back and forth like a rat in a trap as Jesse and the third baseman slowly moved in on their prey. In a desperate attempt to get past Jesse, Grady suddenly slid headfirst into second base, but his attempt proved futile. With a grin of triumph, Jesse swooped down and tagged the runner out.

The sportsmanlike thing for Grady to have done at that point would have been to rise to his feet and trot quickly back to the bench, but sportsmanship had never been Ron Grady's strong suit. Instead, he pulled himself to his feet by grabbing onto Jesse's gym shorts and yanking them down to his ankles. Jesse looked down and saw himself exposed to the world in his slightly frayed jockstrap. Under different circumstances, he might have laughed it off as a prank and planned to take appropriate revenge on Grady at some future date. Knowing that Lisa and her classmates had witnessed the stunt, however, Jesse was furious. He lunged at Grady, tripping over his own shorts as he threw the larger boy to the ground and started trading punches with him.

"Cute ass," said Kerry from the archery range. Lisa smiled and nodded her head.

The fight did not last long. Coach Schneider quickly broke through the crowd of cheering boys to grab Jesse and Grady by their necks.

"Assume the position, boys," said the ex-Marine, and Jesse knew then and there that fighting in Coach Schneider's class had been a serious mistake.

An hour later, Jesse and Grady were still side by side in the center of the baseball diamond. Only now they were in the front-leaning rest position, their elbows slightly bent and their arms aching as each boy held himself up in a painful frozen push-up.

"How much longer you figure he'll keep us here?" asked Jesse, his muscles twitching and his teeth clenched in pain.

"Could be all night," said Grady, gasping for breath. "Guy gets his rocks off like this. I hear he hangs out in queer S and M joints downtown. Likes pretty boys like you."

"Get outta here," said Jesse. He had met a lot of loudmouths like Grady over the years, and he knew that most of them just talked to hear the sound of their own voices. Still, you never knew when one of them was telling you the truth.

But Grady was tired of talking about the coach.

"So what about you and that Poletti girl?" he asked after a silence that seemed to last for hours.

"What about it?"

"You two got a thing going, or what?"

"She's a neighbor," Jesse said a little too quickly. He didn't like talking about Lisa to a guy like Grady. "I drive her to school."

"She giving you any carfare for the ride?" Grady asked, a smirk on his face. Under different circumstances, Jesse might have answered with his fists.

"You got a problem with me, Grady?" He sincerely hoped that he wasn't going to have Grady on his case for the rest of the semester.

"Nah," said the other boy, looking somewhat surprised by Jesse's question. "Just killing time."

Then the whistle blew, and Coach Schneider appeared in his street clothes.

"Okay, boys," he said, already crossing the field in the direction of the faculty parking lot. "Hit the showers."

Both boys collapsed on the ground, their arms and shoulders screaming with relief. They lay there for a long time before getting up slowly like two very arthritic old men. Then, their arms dangling loosely at their sides, the two boys staggered toward the locker room.

If the coach's intention had been to bring the boys closer together, the severity of his punishment was not without some justification. By

the time Jesse and Grady finished their showers, they were bonded together forever by a common hatred for Coach Schneider and his extreme methods of exacting discipline from his students.

"So," said Grady as he slipped into his shirt, "you live around here?"

"Not too far," said Jesse. "My folks bought a place over on Elm Street."

Grady stopped buttoning his shirt and looked up.

"Elm Street?" he echoed. "You telling me you moved into that big white house with the bars on the windows?"

"Yeah. Why?"

Grady grinned and shook his head slowly from side to side.

"Shit," he said. "You can tell your old man he's a real chump."

"What the hell are you talking about?" asked Jesse, his temper flaring once again.

"They've only been trying to unload that dump for five years," said Grady. "Some chick was locked in there by her mother and she went crazy. Seems she watched her boyfriend get butchered by some maniac in the house across the street. They say her poor drunken momma killed herself right inside your front door."

Jesse stared at Grady and tried to decide how much of the story he was making up.

"You're full of shit," he said at last, slamming his locker shut and walking away.

Still, he couldn't help wondering about those weird bars …

Jesse reached the parking lot only to find Lisa Poletti leaning against the Falcon's front fender.

"You didn't have to wait," he said, although he was very glad that she did.

"That's okay." Lisa smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "I wanted to."

Jesse returned the girl's smile and opened the car door. For a moment, he considered kissing her on her pretty mouth and telling her how glad he was to see her. Instead, he slid into the car and started the engine.

"Are you okay?" she asked. Jesse looked at himself in the rearview mirror and shrugged.

"I'm fine," he said, knowing that he didn't look it. An ugly bruise had appeared over his right eye where Grady's fist had landed during their brief scuffle.

"Let me look at that eye," said Lisa. Jesse tilted his head back, suddenly feeling vaguely proud of his injury. "You really shouldn't be

fighting with that jerk."

"Grady?" he said, a little surprised by the intensity of Lisa's concern. "Grady's all right. He's just a hothead."

"You mean a shithead," said Lisa.

"Right," said Jesse.

But even a shithead can be right sometimes, he thought as he gunned the engine and headed for home.

Chapter 3

Jesse lay in bed, his eyes wide open and his brain working overtime.

Not that there was really all that much to think about. Sure, there was Lisa and Grady and school and the coach and the nightmares and a dozen other things that had been on Jesse's mind all day, but there was really nothing Jesse had to think about that couldn't wait until morning. Still, Jesse found himself lying awake, thinking about all those things at once, and there didn't seem to be anything he could do to stop.

Jesse had never had trouble sleeping before. In the past, just thinking about going to bed was almost enough to put him out. Now, whatever switch in his brain that was supposed to turn off at night seemed to be permanently stuck in the on position. Jesse turned from one side to the other, fluffed his pillow, and even tried sleeping with his feet propped up on the headboard, but nothing seemed to work. Jesse felt more wide awake than he had all day.

Maybe it's the damned heat, he thought, throwing his cover on the floor and sitting up. The problem with the air conditioning was really starting to get seriously out of hand. The temperature in the house must have been at least twenty degrees higher than the temperature outside.

And Jesse's room was the hottest of all.

Jesse pulled on a pair of pants and walked down to the kitchen. He remembered reading in a magazine about how milk had some kind of enzyme or something in it that helped you sleep. Jesse figured it was probably bullshit, like most of the stuff in those magazines, but he didn't see how it could hurt to try. Besides, he had to do something besides lie in bed and stare at the ceiling all night.

It was dark in the kitchen, but Jesse wasn't quite ready to face the blinding glare of the overhead light. Guided by the moonlight that shone faintly through the window, he found his way to the refrigerator, the linoleum cold beneath his bare feet.

Now, the last thing anyone expects when opening the refrigerator door in the middle of the night is for something to jump out at him and land at his feet with a resounding crash.

Which is why Jesse almost had heart failure when the bottle of apple juice flung itself out of the refrigerator and shattered on the kitchen floor.

Take it easy, Walsh, he told himself, quickly regaining his composure. He glanced out into the hall, hoping that the noise hadn't disturbed anyone upstairs. He was in no mood to have his father come downstairs and bawl him out for breaking the apple juice bottle in the middle of the night.

Especially when he never even touched the damned bottle.

Jesse crossed the room and unrolled an absurd length of paper toweling from the roll over the sink. *All I need now is a handful of broken glass,* he thought, tearing off an extra half-dozen sheets for good measure.

He had just finished cleaning up when he saw the grotesque face in the kitchen window.

"Shit," he whispered, turning his head away for just a moment. When he looked back, the face was gone.

One thing worse than having something jump out of your refrigerator in the middle of the night is to see a grotesque face leering in at you through your kitchen window—and one thing worse than that is having the face disappear a second later.

Jesse figured he had two choices.

He could assume that his eyes were playing tricks on him and just go back to bed.

Or he could go outside and find out who or what was staring into his kitchen window in the middle of the night.

Taking a deep breath to quiet his pounding heart, Jesse reluctantly chose the second course of action. His palms sweating, he opened the back door and stepped outside.

Silence. Not even a cricket chirped to disturb the absolute quiet of the night. Jesse opened the gate and checked out the side of the house. He thought he saw something move in the shrubbery.

Suddenly he had an idea of who the intruder might be.

"Grady?" he whispered loudly, taking one cautious step closer to the shrubbery. "It better be you, you son of a bitch!"

Jesse was about to pounce on the bush when he heard the sound of ripping wood.

Quickly, Jesse moved to the side of the house and saw the flickering orange light emanating from the cellar window. He got down on his hands and knees and peered inside.

The man in the cellar was definitely not Ron Grady.

Grady didn't wear a filthy red and green striped sweater and a battered fedora hat.

And Grady would definitely not put his hand into a raging furnace.

“Holy shit!” said Jesse as the man pulled a bundle of rags out of the furnace and began to unwrap them.

“Holy shit!” he said again, unable to think of anything more original to say under the circumstances. He raced back through the gate and into the house, heading directly for the cellar door.

The door was wide open, the wooden frame around the lock splintered as if by some huge wrecking bar. Jesse peeked inside, almost deafened by the roar of the furnace. Then he saw the intruder’s eerie shadow on the cellar walls and he knew for sure that this was a problem he didn’t want to handle by himself.

“Dad!” he screamed, slamming the cellar door closed and throwing all his weight against it.

“Dad!” he screamed again as something inside began pounding against the door, a force far stronger than Jesse slowly inching it open.

Jesse let go and bolted toward the foyer, but there was no escape.

The man in the dirty sweater was blocking the way, an evil smile on his scarred face.

“Daddy can’t help you now,” he croaked, flashing his steel blades in Jesse’s face.

Jesse turned to run, but the man with the finger-knives had already grabbed him with a viselike grip and lifted him several inches off the floor.

“I’ve been waiting five years for you, Jesse,” he said, his talons touching the boy’s cheek almost like the gentle fingers of a lover. “We got special work to do, you and me. Things are really going to heat up now.”

Jesse struggled to get free, but it was no use. He turned his face to the side, as disgusted by the madman’s foul breath as he was terrified of his razor-sharp blades.

“We’ll do real good together, you and me,” the man said before suddenly hurling Jesse against the wall. He grinned, exposing a mouthful of crooked yellow teeth. “You got the body,” he said, raising his left hand to the brim of his hat, “I got the brains.”

He took off his hat, and Jesse saw that the top of his skull was completely gone. Beneath the hat was a bloody, pulsating mass of exposed brain matter.

Jesse began to scream, and he was still screaming when his mother and father came running into the bedroom to wake him up.

“Maybe we should call a doctor,” said his mother, holding the boy in her arms as he sat up in bed, trembling and drenched in sweat.

“I’m okay,” said Jesse. He shook his head violently from side to side

in a struggle to regain full consciousness. “It was just a bad dream.”

Just a bad dream, he repeated to himself, wanting desperately to believe it.

Chapter 4

If Jesse had found it hard to fall asleep that night, he was finding it even more difficult to stay awake the following afternoon.

Even under the best of circumstances, Mr. Able was not the sort of biology teacher who inspired students to dissect their frogs with unbounded enthusiasm or run to their guidance counselors to investigate careers in the biological sciences. More often, students who entered Mr. Able's class with a burning interest in biology ended the semester by vowing never to take another science course for the rest of their natural lives.

The subject of today's lecture was the digestive system, and Jesse was finding it more difficult with every passing moment to keep his eyes open. He had not enjoyed an unbroken night's sleep for weeks, and the sound of Mr. Able's droning voice was proving to be just the sort of bland background noise that Jesse needed to lull himself to sleep.

"To review," said Mr. Able, reading as always from the same notes he had been reading to students since landing his first teaching job many years ago, "the solid waste, those nutrients that are not absorbed in the lining of the stomach, the large intestine, or the small intestine—that is, the alimentary canal—are passed out through the colon—"

Someone in the back of the room did an excellent impression of gas passing loudly through the human colon. Mr. Able looked up and waited for the laughter to subside.

"The liquid nutrients," he continued, untroubled by his students' complete lack of interest, "are then carried through an elaborate system of filtering, aided by the pancreas, liver, and gallbladder."

Jesse sat with his chin in his hand, his eyelids at half-mast as the teacher droned on and on. He was not aware that Ron Grady was watching him from across the room.

"… or collected in the bladder to be expelled at a later time," Mr. Able continued. "And this entire process is kept moving through the circulatory system, the center of which is the heart."

Mr. Able paused dramatically, reached under his lab table, and plunked down the bloody heart of a calf.

"Gross!" cried a girl in the front row, and she was clearly not alone in her opinion. Mr. Able treated the class to one of his rare smiles.

This was his favorite part of the semester.

Except, of course, for the day they dissected the fetal pig. Someone almost always passed out before that day was done.

"Four chambers," he explained, using his index finger as a pointer, slipping it into each bloody chamber with great enthusiasm. "Just like the human heart. From the body, through the right auricle, to the right ventricle, and out the pulmonary artery to the lungs."

At that moment, Jesse was the only student in the room who was not completely grossed out by the teacher's revolting demonstration, and that was only because the boy was fast asleep.

Which was also the reason that he was unaware of the slithery serpent that had wrapped itself around his arm and was slowly making its way toward his face.

It was not until the snake hissed and tickled his arm with its long forked tongue that Jesse opened his eyes and screamed, scrambling out of his seat while prying the reptile off his arm.

In an instant, Mr. Able was at the boy's side. He plucked the snake expertly off Jesse's arm and dropped it into the nearby tank from which someone had quietly removed it.

"If you want to play with animals, Mr. Walsh," said the teacher, "may I suggest you join the circus."

Jesse felt himself flush with embarrassment as the class broke out in laughter and applause.

He looked around and saw Ron Grady grinning at him from his seat next to the reptile tank.

Jesse had all but forgotten the incident in biology by the time seventh period rolled around. Tonight he was going to be with Lisa, and nothing a jerk like Grady could do was going to put a permanent damper on his high spirits.

It was unbearably warm in Jesse's room as he pulled his pants on over his bathing suit, but Jesse barely noticed the heat. Tonight promised to be the night that he and Lisa finally became more than just good friends.

Jesse had been trying to work up the courage to ask her out all week, but somehow the time just never seemed right. He had planned to make his move at the big pool party Lisa was throwing at the end of the week and hoped he wouldn't lose his nerve when the right moment presented itself. Fortunately, Lisa had taken the matter into her own hands. When he mentioned that he was looking forward to the party, Lisa asked him if he wanted to come over tonight for a sneak preview.

The invitation was rife with possibilities.

Unfortunately, his father had different plans for Jesse that evening.

“Where do you think you’re going?” asked Ken Walsh as his son bounced merrily down the stairs with a rolled towel under his arm.

“Just out for a while,” said Jesse. He wasn’t ready to tell his father about Lisa Poletti just yet.

“Didn’t I tell you I want that room unpacked tonight?” asked his father, shouting to make himself heard over “Six o’clock News.”

“Come on, Dad,” said Jesse, looking at his mother for sympathy and support.

“Upstairs,” ordered his father. Jesse’s mother was about to speak when her husband fixed her with a withering gaze. “Now,” he said, and the boy knew there was no use arguing. Cursing in a voice too low to be heard, he turned around and stomped back up the stairs.

A minute later, a telephone range at the Poletti house on the other end of Elm Street.

“There’s a Jesse on the phone,” Mrs. Poletti informed her daughter, sticking her head out through the sliding glass doors that led to the pool.

“Thanks, Mom.” Lisa hoisted herself out of the pool, threw a towel around her shoulders, and picked up the wireless phone on the poolside table.

“Jesse, hi … Oh, that’s okay. I’m sorry you can’t make it … No, I understand. Parents can be real pains. I’ll see you in the morning, okay?”

Jesse hung up the phone and threw himself down on the bed. So he wouldn’t go swimming with Lisa tonight. Big deal! He’d have plenty of time to be alone with her at the party. Besides, he was still going to see her in the morning, and that was certainly something to feel good about.

Having convinced himself that the world was not coming to an end, Jesse sat up and surveyed the room that he was now obliged to put into some semblance of order. It was clearly going to be no easy task.

Jesse had decided long ago that no unpleasant chore should ever be undertaken until the proper musical accompaniment had been chosen. He pulled a shoe box out of one of the many open cartons surrounding the bed and rifled through his collection of cassettes. He picked out one of the tapes, popped it into his cassette player, and turned up the volume.

Jesse wondered how anyone ever got anything done before the invention of rock ’n’ roll. There was something about the pounding of the drums and the driving rhythm of the guitars that never failed to

make his feet start to move and his heart start to pump just a little bit faster. Tired though he was, Jesse was on his feet now, shuffling along in time to the music as he started randomly dumping the contents of cartons directly into his bureau drawers. Humming along with the music, he pulled a pair of wraparound sunglasses out of a box and put them on. He danced across the room and found his Stetson, pulling the big old cowboy hat down low over his eyes. There was a searing lead guitar solo on the tape now, and Jesse danced over to the mirror, miming a brilliant air-guitar riff.

Looking good! he told himself, swinging over to the desk in time to the driving beat of the music. He picked up a box of pencils and assorted school supplies and dumped them unceremoniously into the desk drawer just as the drum solo began. Jesse snatched up a pair of unsharpened pencils and laid down some flawless paradiddles on the edge of the desk. Delighted by his own spectacular aptitude as a drummer, Jesse shoved the two pencils up his nostrils, tucked his thumbs under his armpits, and began flapping his elbows joyously in time to the music.

"Jesse's funky chicken," he said out loud, spinning around in a perfect imitation of James Brown, the Godfather of Soul, at his absolute funkiest.

He had just completed his spin when he saw Lisa and his mother standing in the doorway.

Jesse's mother was knocking timidly on the open door as Jesse yanked the pencils out of his nose and turned off the tape player. He glanced at himself in the mirror and pulled off the sunglasses and Stetson hat.

"Hi," he said, trying very hard to sound as if he had not just been caught acting like a total fool.

"Hi," said Lisa. Jesse looked pointedly at his mother. The woman sighed deeply and went downstairs.

"I told your mom you invited me over," said Lisa, staring with wide eyes at Jesse's pigsty of a room as she stepped inside. "I guess I should have called first."

"No, that's okay," said Jesse as he threw the pencils into the desk drawer. "I was just unpacking."

"I know." Lisa glanced casually into one of the many open cartons on the floor. "I figured you might like some help."

"Yeah?"

Lisa shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"What are friends for?" she asked, pushing back her sleeves as she started to unload the largest carton in the room.

After half an hour of unpacking, Jesse thought that his room looked almost like one of those flawless teenage rooms that he had seen on reruns of old TV sitcoms. In fact, although the room was still very far from what Jesse's father would consider to be straightened up, Jesse and Lisa had undeniably taken a few major steps in the right direction.

Jesse was busy positioning his baseball trophy in a conspicuous spot on the corner of his dresser when Lisa pulled an aerosol can of jock-itch spray out of a carton.

"Where does this go?" she asked, a mischievous smile on her face.

His face reddening slightly, Jesse grabbed the can away from her and stashed it out of sight behind his trophy. He looked around for some more suitable unpacking for the girl to do.

"There's a box of sweaters over there if you want to put them away," he said. Lisa nodded and dragged the box closer to the closet. She grabbed a handful of sweaters, folded them neatly, and then stepped up onto a chair to stack them on the upper shelf. She was about to step down when she noticed a small leather-bound book in the back corner of the shelf.

"What's this?" she asked, handing the small red book to Jesse.

"Looks like a diary." He casually fingered the leather strap that snapped into a small metal latch on the front.

Lisa took the book back and sat down on Jesse's desk chair. She glanced at the boy for a moment and then opened the latch. When Jesse didn't object, she opened the book and began to read out loud.

"Nancy Thompson, 323 Elm Street … Hey, this thing is five years old!"

Jesse stepped forward and looked over Lisa's shoulder.

"You know her?" he asked.

"Before my time," said Lisa with a shake of her head. "I just moved here three years ago myself."

Lisa flipped a few pages and resumed reading.

"February 17: My birthday. Daddy came by today with a big old stuffed bear for me. He took me to dinner and a movie. When we got back, he and mother had another one of their fights. He left angry. I wish they would stop fighting …"

Jesse went back to unpacking, clearly uninterested in the problems of some girl who lived here five years ago.

"I think it's sad," said Lisa, continuing to leaf through the pages of the diary.

"Traumas of a ten-year-old," said Jesse, wondering to himself why girls were so fascinated by that sort of thing.

“March 7,” Lisa read, her voice slightly louder now as if to command Jesse’s attention. “Glen asked me to sleep with him again.” Jesse stopped what he was doing and started paying attention. “I can’t yet,” the diary continued. “I like him and I want to make him happy, but I’m not sure that I love him. I can’t sleep with someone I don’t love.”

“That’s typical,” said Jesse, suddenly extremely conscious that he was alone with Lisa in his bedroom. “I hope she didn’t expect to make the best-seller list with this thing.”

Lisa ignored him and continued scanning the pages.

“Listen to this!” she said. “Sometimes, when I’m lying here in bed, I can see Glen across the way getting ready for bed. His body is slim and smooth. I know I shouldn’t watch, but that part of me that wants him forces me to. That’s when I weaken. That’s when I want to go to him.”

Jesse strode quickly across the room and took the book from Lisa. He reread the passage and then turned the page with a disappointed look on his face.

“That’s it?” he said, flipping through the pages. “Wait, she skipped a week.” He looked at Lisa for a moment and then read out loud. “March 15: He comes to me at night. Horrible. Ugly. Dirty. Under the sheets with me, tearing at my nightgown with his steel claw.” Jesse paused. There was something about the steel claw … “He keeps taking me to the boiler room. He wants to kill me.” Jesse turned the page, and suddenly his hands began to tremble.

“What is it?” asked Lisa. Jesse handed her the book. There was one sentence scrawled across the page.

Tina is dead.

Jesse took the book back and read the next page aloud.

“Rod’s been killed. He got Rod. There’s just Glen and me now. Mustn’t fall asleep.”

“Are you okay?” asked Lisa, alarmed as much by the expression on Jesse’s face as by the weird diary entries.

“It’s just something Grady told me today,” said Jesse. “About the people that lived here before. He said the girl went crazy after she saw her boyfriend get killed across the street.”

Lisa was about to tell him what she thought about Ron Grady and his stupid stories when Jesse’s mother walked in.

“How’s it going?” she asked cheerfully.

“Okay,” said Jesse, hiding the diary behind his back. He wasn’t quite ready to talk to his mother about the strange book or about Grady’s spooky story.

“Looks great!” said his mother, smiling as she surveyed the room. “I thought you kids might like to take a break. I’ve got some cold cider downstairs.”

Lisa glanced at Jesse’s alarm clock and shook her head.

“Thanks,” she said, “but I’d better be going. I’ve got a major paper due the end of this week.”

“Let me know if you change your mind,” said Jesse’s mother before leaving the room. There was something about this girl that she really liked.

Jesse waited until his mother was gone before turning back to Lisa.

“You sure you have to go?” he asked.

“Afraid so,” she replied. “World history. But I’ll see you in the morning, right?”

Jesse smiled and nodded his head.

“Let me know how that thing turns out,” said Lisa, pointing to the diary.

Jesse looked down at the book that he still clenched tightly in his hand.

His fingers had left a deep indentation in the diary’s soft leather binding.

Chapter 5

"Kind of warm in here, isn't it?"

Jesse's mother had just finished covering the parakeet cage as she did every evening around that time. She didn't like to complain, but she had never seen birds sweat before.

Ken Walsh glared at his wife and wiped the perspiration off his forehead. She had been after him for the past several days to do something about the air conditioning, and now it was unbearably warm in the house. Ken hated to be proved wrong about anything, especially in front of Angela and Jesse, but he had to admit to himself that he had waited a little too long to put in the damned Freon. He climbed out of his recliner and walked over to the thermostat near the kitchen door.

"It's ninety-seven degrees in here!" He immediately pulled the cover plate off the thermostat and began fiddling with the coil. He wasn't exactly sure what he was doing, but Ken Walsh was a man who believed that it was always better to be doing something than not to be doing anything at all.

Jesse was aware of the intense heat the moment he walked in the room. It was warm throughout the house, but the heat was especially oppressive in the living room that evening. He was about to ask his father when he planned to do something about the air conditioning when Angela raised an index finger to her lips.

"Shhh!" she said. "The birds are sleeping."

Jesse never cared much for Mr. Blue and Mr. Green, and Angela knew it. She had been the one who wanted parakeets in the first place, and she had been the one to come up with their ridiculous names. Jesse used to tease her by insisting that the blue parakeet was actually Mr. Green and vice versa, but they both quickly tired of that game. Now, Jesse generally just ignored the creatures altogether. They were quiet birds who required nothing more in the way of daily care than a little birdseed, some fresh water, and a clean layer of newspaper on the bottom of their cage. Mr. Blue and Mr. Green were the kind of pets it was easy to ignore.

At least, until that night.

The first terrifying squawk that came from within the covered cage sounded as if it were filtered through a guitar amplifier that someone had accidentally turned up all the way. Jesse rushed to the cage and

tore away the cover.

Mr. Blue had pierced Mr. Green's neck with his sharp beak and was proceeding to rip the green bird to shreds with his claws.

Without thinking, Jesse opened the cage and reached inside to separate the attacking bird from his victim. Mr. Blue immediately turned his attention to the intruding hand, drawing blood from Jesse's wrist before flying out into the living room. Angela screamed as the bird circled over her head sounding a loud war cry that seemed more appropriate for an eagle than a parakeet. Suddenly the bird swooped down, diving directly at Jesse's father. Ken Walsh screamed in pain as Mr. Blue cut a bloody gash just below his left eye.

"Get a broom or something!" he yelled as the bird crashed into a lamp and sent it crashing to the floor.

Maybe it was just the excitement of the moment, but Jesse would have sworn that the parakeet had somehow grown to the size of a small pigeon hawk.

The bird was hovering around the light fixture now, its beak and most of its head covered with blood. Jesse's mother had handed her husband a broom, and he began swatting wildly at the fast-moving bird. Suddenly, Mr. Blue let out a terrifying scream and dove for Jesse's head. Jesse ducked just before his father swung the broom, knocking over the other lamp as the bird soared back toward the ceiling. It seemed to be puffing up even larger now, and a low growl issued from its throat. Angela wrapped herself tightly around her mother's leg and whimpered in terror as the demonic bird looked around to select its next victim.

Then there was a loud explosion, and Mr. Blue burst into flames in midair.

Angela was still crying hysterically as her father dashed into the kitchen with a screwdriver and a pipe wrench in his hands. Jesse watched as the man threw his full weight against the gas range and tried to pull the heavy appliance away from the wall.

"Help me with this thing," he said, glaring angrily at Jesse.

"It's not the gas, Dad," said Jesse as calmly as possible under the circumstances.

"Don't tell me it's not the gas," said his father, beads of perspiration dripping into the bloody gash below his eye. "Your mother thought she smelled gas."

"I wasn't sure, Ken," said Jesse's mother timidly.

"All right, then," he said, banging a fist on the range. "What is it? Bird rabies? That cheap seed you've been buying? There's got to be an explanation. Animals don't just burst into flames for no reason!"

“Well, it sure isn’t leaky gas pipes,” said Jesse. He hated it when his father acted so irrationally. Why did he always think there was an easy answer to every problem?

Ken Walsh straightened his back and cracked his head on the edge of the range hood. Clutching his head with one hand and groaning in pain, he whirled around and pointed an accusing finger at Jesse.

“You set this whole thing up, didn’t you?” he said, a gleam of sudden revelation in his eye. “This is one of your sick jokes, isn’t it?”

“Oh, Ken!” said his wife in disgust.

“You know what I’m talking about.” He lifted his wrench to shoulder level and took a step closer to Jesse. “What did you use, a firecracker? Some kind of cherry bomb?”

Jesse shook his head, refusing to believe that his father could even think of accusing him of such a thing.

“I don’t have to listen to this,” he said, storming angrily out of the kitchen.

“Come back here!” yelled his father, but Jesse was already halfway up the stairs. Ken Walsh stared blankly at the pipe wrench in his trembling hand before turning to his sadeyed wife. “I don’t know, Shirl,” he said, taking her in his arms. “He used to be such a good kid.”

Sleep came easily to Jesse the night Mr. Blue exploded.

Between parakeets bursting into flame and the incredible stuff he had been reading in Nancy Thompson’s diary, Jesse figured that going to sleep was the only sensible thing to do if he wanted to hold onto his sanity until morning.

If I think about all this stuff tonight, I’ll go nuts, he thought as he climbed into bed and turned off the light. Jesse pulled the cover up over his head and closed his eyes, confident that things would begin to make more sense after a good night’s sleep.

It was a good plan, but it didn’t work out exactly the way he had hoped.

Shortly after two o’clock in the morning, Jesse emerged from his room and stepped lightly past his parents’ bedroom. He went downstairs into the dark foyer and paused for a long moment at the cellar door.

There was something Jesse had to do, but he knew that doing it was going to change his life forever.

Jesse wasn’t sure he wanted his life to change.

Not now.

And certainly not like that.

"Do it," he whispered aloud, reviving his rapidly failing courage. He took a deep breath, opened the door, and turned on the light. Slowly he climbed down the stairs and approached the furnace. He squatted down, reached past the firebox door, and pulled out a heavy object wrapped in a bundle of dirty old rags.

It was the old leather glove fitted with rusty knife blades that the intruder had discovered in Jesse's dream.

And then the furnace switched on with a deafening roar and flames filled the iron firebox.

"Hot enough for you?"

Jesse whirled around and saw the man in the red and green sweater leaning up against the cellar wall.

"Go ahead, Jesse," the man croaked, nodding his head at the obscene object in Jesse's hand. "Try it on for size."

Jesse looked at the glove and saw that the dull and rusty blades were now razor-sharp and gleaming in the dim light.

"What do you want?" Jesse demanded, instantly dropping the glove on the cellar floor. The man in the dirty sweater looked down at the gleaming blades and then turned his hateful gaze on Jesse for just a fraction of a second. Then his eyes softened again and his mouth twisted into the vague semblance of a smile.

"I need you to finish my work," he said. "Let me teach you, Jesse. We'll have fun. You like my little trick with the bird?"

Jesse stepped behind a stack of cartons as the man slowly moved toward him.

"Kill for me," he whispered, his voice almost seductive now as he stepped closer to the terrified boy. "Come on, Jesse. Come to Freddy."

"No!" screamed Jesse. He whirled around, knocking over the stack of cartons as he dashed wildly toward the cellar steps. He only got halfway up when he missed his footing and slipped, tumbling headfirst down the stairs.

When he came to, he was alone.

The furnace was off and Freddy was gone.

Only the finger-knives remained, as shiny and new as the day they were made.

No one was talking about Mr. Blue and Mr. Green at breakfast the next morning. In fact, no one was talking at all. Ken and Shirley Walsh were staring into their coffee cups and picking at some slices of dry toast while Angela used the corner of her waffle to draw little circles

in a small puddle of imitation maple syrup. Then Jesse came into the kitchen and poured himself a cup of hot black coffee.

"Why did it take them five years to sell this house, Dad?" he asked, sitting directly opposite his father at the table.

His father looked at Jesse with surprise for just a second and then looked away.

"I don't know," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I guess they couldn't get the right price."

"And I suppose you don't know anything about a murder across the street and a crazy girl who lived here who saw the whole thing?"

"I don't know," said his father, still avoiding Jesse's eyes. "I guess they told me something about it. What difference does it make?"

Ken Walsh felt his wife's eyes on his neck and looked up at her.

"Come on, Shirl," he said, his tone halfway between anger and apology. "How do you think we got such a good deal? Listen, all old houses have stories."

"Did they tell you she went totally out of her mind?" asked Jesse, speaking to his mother now as well as to his father. "That they had to put her away? Did they tell you that her mother killed herself by the front door?"

There was a moment of silence, and then Jesse realized that his sister had started to cry.

"Mommy, I'm scared," said Angela, turning her moist eyes to her mother.

"It's all right, sweetheart," the woman replied, taking her daughter in her arms. "Daddy and Jesse are just playing make-believe." She tightened her hold on Angela and gave Jesse a hard look. "I don't think we should be talking about this now."

"You see what you're doing?" said Jesse's father. "You've upset your sister with all this talk. I don't want to hear another word about it. There's nothing wrong with this house!"

Jesse was about to tell his father about the glove in the cellar when his mother started sniffing the air.

"Is something burning?" she asked.

Jesse turned and saw that the toaster on the countertop was glowing red-hot. Suddenly, flames shot out of the slots, scorching the ceiling and the wallpaper behind the counter.

Jesse's father was on his feet a second later, beating out the fire with a dish towel. When the fire was out, he turned away from the smoldering toaster and tossed the burnt towel in the sink.

"Craziest thing I ever saw," he said, staring in bewilderment at the charred cord that hung limply from the side of the toaster. "The

damned thing wasn't even plugged in!"

Jesse took one more sip of coffee and then left without saying good-bye.

Chapter 6

"This is amazing," said Lisa, studying the talon-tipped glove that Jesse had recovered from the cellar that morning. She was sitting next to Jesse in the Falcon and finishing off the remains of a fast-food breakfast. "Your dream told you where this was?"

Jesse sipped his coffee and nodded.

"Only it was more like sleepwalking," he said. "All I know is I woke up on the cellar floor, and there it was."

He reached into his knapsack and pulled out the leather-bound diary.

"I couldn't get back to sleep, so I stayed up all night reading this thing. It gets really crazy toward the end, after all the death stuff."

"Even crazier?" said Lisa, popping a French fry into her mouth.

"Listen to this," said Jesse. "It seems her mother took her down to the basement and showed her the glove. That's when she found out about Fred Krueger."

"Who's Fred Krueger?"

"The guy in her dream. It seems he was a real guy who went around killing kids about fifteen years ago."

"Maybe you were having a premonition or something," said Lisa. "You know, like those guys who help the police solve crimes and find missing people? Anything like this ever happen to you before?"

"Not really. You think that's what it is?"

"Could be. Anyway, don't worry about it. That diary would give anybody nightmares."

"I guess," said Jesse, already starting to feel a little bit better. Obviously, there was a logical explanation for all this.

All he had to do was figure out what the hell it could possibly be.

Jesse was trying not to think about his dream that afternoon as he stepped up to bat at baseball practice. Lisa had asked to borrow the diary, and Jesse was confident that she would somehow make sense out of the whole crazy situation. Besides, there were other things on his mind that were already beginning to seem more important than some weird dream.

Like the fact that Lisa had kissed him good-bye for the first time that morning.

It wasn't Jesse's first kiss. He had gone steady with a girl last year, and she and Jesse had done a lot more than just kiss before the relationship had ended. Still, there was something about Lisa's kiss that morning that made Jesse feel as if no girl had ever really kissed him before. It was a kiss that promised things to come that would go far beyond anything Jesse had ever experienced in his seventeen years.

"Strike two!" yelled Schneider, rudely interrupting Jesse's reverie. He turned around and looked at the coach for a second before adjusting his stance and choking up on the bat.

He hadn't even noticed the first strike.

Jesse looked down the baseline and saw that the runner on third was Ron Grady. He knew by the expression on Grady's face that the boy had no expectation of being driven home while Jesse was at bat.

I think I'll surprise him, thought Jesse, focusing his complete attention on the ball in the pitcher's hand. He watched the ball coming at him now, his mind on nothing but the point of contact between the fast-moving sphere and the bat in his hand. He connected with a solid crack, slamming the ball past the pitcher and reaching first base just as Grady touched home plate to score the winning run.

"You hit that ball pretty good, Walsh," said Grady in the locker room after practice.

"It was okay," said Jesse modestly. Everyone on the team had congratulated him on his playing that afternoon, but hearing it from a guy like Ron Grady was an unexpected bonus.

"Who told you to choke up that way?" asked Grady as he finished buttoning his shirt.

"My dad," said Jesse. "He played in the minors for a while when he got out of college."

"No shit?" said Grady, genuinely impressed.

Jesse shrugged and finished dressing. He wasn't sure that a guy like Grady could ever really be anybody's friend, but it sure would be nice not to have him as an enemy.

"Schneider shouldn't have called you out on that double," said Jesse, recalling one of several bad calls the coach had made that afternoon.

"Yeah," said Grady, "Schneider's got a stick up his ass today."

Jesse laughed. "Schneider's always got a stick up his ass," he said, and Grady nodded in agreement.

Of course, the conversation might have taken a whole different turn if either boy had heard Schneider enter the room a few moments earlier.

By the time Jesse met Lisa in the nearly deserted parking lot, he and Grady had spent a very long and very painful hour running laps around the athletic field.

"Sorry, Lisa," Jesse said, still gasping for breath as he leaned next to the girl on the Falcon's dented fender. "Schneider did it to me again."

"I just got here myself," said Lisa, shrugging off Jesse's lateness as she gestured toward the stack of books piled up beside her. "I've been at the library all afternoon. Cut four classes!"

Jesse glanced at the books for a second and then looked back at Lisa.

"What is all this?"

"Research," said Lisa. She smiled and then gave him a quick kiss. "Let's go for a ride and I'll tell you all about it."

They were driving down a country road that Jesse had never seen before when Lisa started leafing through one of the books on her lap.

"I'm convinced that you've had a genuine psychic vision," she said, ignoring Jesse's skeptical look. "At first I wasn't sure, because you said you never had anything like last night happen to you before. But it says in this book that almost everyone has the potential to tune in to the other world, even though most people never do. It has something to do with the environment. Like they have to be in a place that's sending signals."

"Like a haunted house?" said Jesse. The girl gave him a look that made Jesse wish he had kept his comment to himself. "Sorry, Lisa, but I don't believe in ghosts."

"You don't have to," she said. "You just have to believe in energy. You've got electricity in your body, don't you?"

"Sure." Jesse remembered Mr. Able's lecture on the central nervous system. "Neurons, synapses, and all that stuff?"

"And heat and chemical reactions, too. Where do you think it all goes when you die?"

"I don't know," said Jesse with a shrug. This wasn't the sort of thing he had ever given much thought to. "Into the air?"

"Make a left at the intersection," said Lisa. Jesse followed her instructions as she continued her lecture. "What about essential energy? What about the soul? Does that go into the air, too? Do you think there's good energy and bad energy?"

"I don't know," said Jesse, confused by Lisa's weird questions. "Where are we going, anyway?"

"Park over there and I'll show you," said Lisa, pointing at an old burnt-out building that had suddenly appeared from nowhere.

"What is this place?" asked Jesse. He stepped out of the car, walked

past the No Trespassing sign that dangled from a rusty chain between two iron poles, and read some of the graffiti that were scrawled across the building's many boarded-up windows.

"Remember in the diary?" said Lisa, grinning with excitement. "Remember how Nancy kept finding herself in a boiler room?"

"So?"

"So I did some research on our friend Fred Krueger, and this is where he worked! In this old power plant!"

Jesse stared at Lisa in disbelief as she handed him photocopies of local newspaper headlines she had found in the library.

KRUEGER FREED ON TECHNICALITY! D.A. RESIGNS!
JUSTICE DONE! KRUEGER KILLED BY MOB!
SPRINGWOOD SLASHER DIES IN HELLISH INFERNO!

"Holy shit," said Jesse. He looked up and saw that Lisa had already climbed over the rotting boards that once blocked the entrance to the old generating plant. He quickly followed her and found himself inside a huge boiler room.

"He kidnapped twenty kids and brought them all here to die," said Lisa, looking around as if expecting to see the rotting bodies. There was a long silence before she spoke again. "Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Do you feel anything?"

"What do you mean?" asked Jesse.

"I thought you might be able to make a connection."

Jesse looked at her and smiled.

"Any ghosts in here?" he shouted, his voice echoing in the large deserted building.

"Cut it out," said Lisa. She sounded annoyed and just a little bit frightened.

"Well, what am I supposed to do?"

"I don't know," Lisa admitted. "Concentrate or something."

Jesse stared at the ceiling for a moment and then closed his eyes.

"I feel like a jerk," he said.

"Just concentrate," she whispered.

Jesse began walking around in a small circle, his eyes shut tight.

"Anything?" asked Lisa. Jesse shook his head.

Then he heard a faint scratching noise.

"Wait," he said. He walked slowly across the room toward the mesh-iron stairway that led up to the catwalk. He reached out his

hand to the board that was leaning up against the bottom step and touched it lightly.

“Jesse?” whispered Lisa, her hand shaking on his shoulder as he yanked the board away.

A large black rat snarled from its nest beneath the staircase, and Jesse and Lisa ran for the doorway as fast as their legs would carry them.

A minute later they were sitting on a boulder near a clump of shade trees a few yards away from the old power plant.

“Disappointed?” asked Jesse when he had finally caught his breath.

“Disappointed?”

“About not finding any bogeymen.”

“I’ll get over it.” Lisa smiled, but Jesse sensed that she really was feeling let down. He moved closer to her, his thigh now resting against hers. “Anyway, we proved that you’re sensitive,” she said. “You sensed that the rat was there, didn’t you? And I can feel something about you. Sometimes I feel like I know what you’re thinking.”

“Do you?” said Jesse, grinning broadly as he put his arm around the girl’s shoulder.

“Maybe it only happens when you’re sleeping,” said Lisa, snuggling up a little closer. “That’s the way it was with Nancy, wasn’t it?”

“Now there’s an idea,” said Jesse. “Maybe we should drive out to the beach tonight and lay out a couple of blankets and see what happens when I fall asleep.”

Lisa smiled and caressed the hand that rested on her shoulder.

“Maybe we should,” she said, her voice very soft. “Strictly for science, of course.”

“Of course,” said Jesse, his lips now almost touching hers. “If you’re sure you wouldn’t mind being out on the beach with a potential lunatic.”

“Ghostbusters are fearless,” whispered Lisa.

Then they were in each other’s arms, and this time the kiss was for real. Jesse felt the blood pounding in his temples as Lisa pressed her body tightly against his, her tongue hungrily exploring the inside of his mouth. This was the kind of kiss Jesse had waited for all his life, and Lisa was the girl he had always dreamed it would happen with. He slid his hand underneath her shirt and was thrilled to find that she offered no resistance.

And then he pulled away, an agonized expression on his face.

“What is it?” asked Lisa.

Jesse just shook his head and groaned. His forehead was throbbing

and his skin felt as if someone had set it on fire. He had never felt anything this intense before in his entire life. Every part of his body, from the soles of his feet to his tingling fingertips, had suddenly begun to hurt all at once. It was almost as if his total being were undergoing some sort of bizarre transformation.

“It’s gone now,” he said, the pain suddenly subsiding as abruptly as it had begun.

“Oh, Jesse,” said Lisa, throwing her arms around the boy and holding him close. “You definitely have to get some sleep.”

Jesse stared at the old power plant and nodded his head. He wondered if he would ever sleep again.

Chapter 7

It was another unbearably hot night in the Walsh house. Jesse heard thunder in the distance as he tossed and turned in bed, sweat pouring down his body while he struggled in vain to find a comfortable position. *Might as well read for a while,* he thought, reaching out to switch on the lamp at the side of the bed. He touched the lamp and abruptly pulled his hand back in pain.

The switch was red-hot, and the plastic lampshade was beginning to melt.

Jesse sat up and looked around. The room was literally hot as a furnace. On his bookshelf, a candle had melted into a sticky pool of wax. The laminated shelf on which the candle stood was bubbling gently, and a record he had left out the night before was hanging limply over the edge like something out of the Dali painting his art teacher had shown the class last week.

And where was that annoying scraping sound coming from?

Jesse stood up and cautiously followed the sound to his desk drawer. He put his hand on the drawer pull and took a deep breath. *The last thing in the world I want to see right now is another rat,* he thought. Then he opened the drawer and found out that he was wrong.

The last thing in the world he wanted to see right then was Fred Krueger's glove, its fingers moving independently, scraping little cuts in the bottom of the desk drawer.

He slammed the drawer shut and listened to the sound of his own heart beating.

And then he became aware of another noise off in the distance.

Swish, thump. Swish, thump.

Jesse slipped into his jeans and stepped out into the hallway. The sound was coming from Angela's room. He pushed the door open and gazed inside.

Angela was in the middle of the room, jumping rope and chanting.

"One, two, Freddy's coming for you. Three, four, better lock your door."

She looked at Jesse, smiled weirdly, and continued jumping and chanting without missing a beat.

"Five, six, grab your crucifix …"

Jesse slammed the door and ran down the stairs. He went into the kitchen and looked out the window. There was a serious thunderstorm raging outside, with a strange bluish lightning that was almost too bright to look at. Jesse clapped his hands over his ears as the sky itself seemed to split open, a multiple flash of lightning followed by the loudest clap of thunder he had ever heard.

And then a bolt of lightning shattered the kitchen window, zigzagging its way across the room to destroy a pile of dishes that had been left on the counter overnight. Jesse stared in horror as a plume of black smoke rose from the spot where the dishes had stood just moments before.

That bolt was meant for me, he thought, dashing out the door and into the street.

It was still pouring outside, but Jesse was no longer on the familiar streets of Springwood. He was in the heart of the inner city now, walking down some dark deserted street that he had never seen before. There was a dim streetlight on the corner, and beneath the light was a seedy-looking bar. Jesse went in.

The bar was packed with the most degenerate assortment of characters Jesse had ever imagined. Prostitutes and their pimps were soliciting business from the drunks at the bar while a gang of motorcycle toughs in leather and chains hassled a pair of transvestites in the back booth. Jesse ignored an obscene suggestion from a grossly obese hooker and sat down at the bar. The bartender glanced at Jesse and drew him a cold beer. Jesse nodded in appreciation and reached for the glass.

A large hand slapped down on his wrist, grasping it tightly with powerful fingers.

Jesse looked up to see Coach Schneider standing before him with a sadistic grin on his ugly face.

He likes pretty boys like you, Grady had said, and for one fleeting moment Jesse almost wished that the large hand that had grabbed his wrist belonged to Freddy Krueger.

And then Jesse was back at school, jogging around the edge of the gym floor in his bare feet. He couldn't remember how long he had been running, but his aching lungs and pounding heart told him that it had already been much too long. Coach Schneider watched from the side of the gym, indifferent to Jesse's pain as he continued to run endless laps, every muscle in his calves and thighs seemingly strained to the breaking point. Round and round he went, the sweat streaming down his body, until he was sure he couldn't run another lap. He was about to collapse when he heard the coach's whistle blowing loudly in his ear.

Jesse had hardly stopped running when the coach grabbed him and hurled him violently against the wall of folded wooden bleachers.

"Hit the showers," barked the coach as Jesse scrambled to his feet and staggered into the locker room.

And while Jesse showered, he envisioned the very strange scene that was being enacted at that moment in Coach Schneider's office.

The coach had just unlocked the equipment locker when he heard the first of the tennis racquet strings snap. He stared at the racquet and shook his heavy head slowly from side to side.

It was very unusual for a string to snap while a racquet was hanging on the wall.

It was unheard of for a string to give off smoke before snapping.

Three strings had sizzled and snapped before the first basketball threw itself off the top shelf of the equipment locker. No sooner had the coach bent down to pick up the ball than two more balls flew out of the metal cabinet and landed at his feet. The fourth ball knocked a trophy off the coach's desk, and the fifth struck him sharply on the side of the head.

Coach Schneider was still sitting on the floor when the first of the dumbbells went whizzing by. The five-pounder just put a serious dent in the coach's filing cabinet, but the heavier one that followed managed to crack the reinforced glass of the office window.

Gym equipment was flying everywhere now as the coach crawled slowly toward the locker like a soldier creeping beneath a volley of machine-gun fire. He had just dodged an especially vicious medicine ball when one of the jump ropes on his desk slithered across the floor, wrapping itself tightly around the coach's wrist before suddenly yanking him off balance. Schneider was struggling to free himself when a second rope shot off the top of his desk and looped itself around his other wrist. The coach was screaming for help when the office door slammed open, and he was still screaming as the ropes around his wrists dragged him out of the office and into the shower room.

Jesse watched in mute horror as the coach was hoisted upward by the wrists, his hands tied to two adjacent shower nozzles and his face turned to the tiled wall. Suddenly, his clothing fell away like so much soggy tissue paper. A stack of towels came to life, drawing blood as they snapped in midair at Schneider's exposed back and buttocks. The room was filled with steam now as a tall figure in a red and green sweater and a battered fedora slowly moved toward the coach. Cackling insanely, the man in the red and green sweater lifted his right arm to reveal the four sharp blades that fit so perfectly into the cutaway fingers of his glove. And then he brought the blades down,

cutting four long, deep tears into Coach Schneider's flesh. The coach screamed in agony as the blood began to ooze from his wounds, but his screams seemed only to delight the man with the deadly finger-knives. Again and again he struck, slashing away even as his victim's body went limp and blood began to flow from the shower heads.

And then Jesse too went limp, falling to his knees in a crimson pool as he stared in disbelief at the bloody glove on his own right hand.

• • •

Ken Walsh was rudely awakened from a dream of his own when the police brought Jesse home that night.

"This belong to you?" asked the burly cop in the rain slicker. Jesse stood at his side, wearing nothing but a large woolen police blanket.

His father nodded his head in disbelief as the policeman shoved Jesse into the house.

"We found him wandering out on the highway in the rain, completely naked. Try to keep a leash on him, okay?"

Jesse's father thanked the officer for his trouble. He waited until the man was gone before turning to Jesse.

"Let's put our cards on the table," he said in a surprisingly calm voice as he paced the kitchen floor. Jesse sat at the table, sipping the hot tea his mother had just made for him. "There's not going to be any retribution. No fire and brimstone. I just have two questions. You answer them and then we'll all go to bed. Okay?"

Jesse took another sip of tea and nodded weakly.

"Fine," said his father. "What are you taking and who are you getting it from?"

Jesse almost choked on his tea. He shook his head from side to side.

"I'm not taking drugs, Dad." He turned to his mother, who sat staring at him from across the table. "Can I go to bed now?"

"Go ahead," she said, touching his cheek softly with the side of her hand.

Jesse's father was still nodding his head slowly, even after Jesse had left the room and disappeared up the stairs.

"He's on something," he said, as sure of his son's drug use as he had ever been sure of anything in his life.

Jesse's father had not changed his mind by daybreak. He was perched on a ladder removing the security bars from an upstairs window when he saw Jesse run out of the house and jump into his car.

"He needs professional help," said Jesse's mother as the boy drove

off. “I think we should take him to a psychiatrist.”

“Are you nuts?” asked her husband. He had had plenty of problems in his own life, but he had never gone running off to get his head shrunk by some quack with a beard and a funny accent. “What the hell is that going to do?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “I just know he needs help, and we don’t know how to give it to him.”

Ken began climbing down the ladder, an argumentative expression on his face. Suddenly, his wife turned to him and pointed a threatening finger in his direction.

“Don’t fight me on this!” she said before he could speak. Then she turned away and stomped back toward the house.

“He needs a kick in the butt, is what he needs!” Ken shouted. “The boy needs a methadone clinic!”

Shirl whirled around with a fierce expression that her husband had never before seen on the woman’s face.

“Blow it out your ass, Ken!” she said. He was about to reply when he suddenly lost his footing and fell off the ladder.

Jesse had hardly said a word to Lisa during the entire drive to school that morning.

“I wish you’d tell me what’s bothering you,” she said as he pulled into the student parking lot.

“I’m fine,” said Jesse, avoiding the girl’s eyes. How could he possibly explain what was happening when he hardly understood it himself?

“You didn’t say more than two words to me the whole way here,” Lisa persisted. “You had another nightmare, didn’t you?”

“Yeah,” he said, reluctant to go into detail. “I definitely had a bad night.”

“You want to talk about it?”

Jesse turned to her and looked her straight in the eye for the first time that morning.

“My dad thinks I’m on drugs, my mom thinks I’m crazy, and I’m beginning to think maybe my mom is right.”

Lisa was about to assure him that everything would be all right when Jesse noticed the crowd that had gathered in front of the gym entrance behind the athletic field.

“Oh God,” said Jesse, already imagining the worst as he jumped out of the car and dashed across the parking lot. Lisa quickly followed, chasing after the boy as he pushed through the crowd that pressed up

against the police barricade.

"What's going on?" asked Jesse, picking Ron Grady out of the noisy crowd.

"Where you been, man?" said Grady, shouting to make himself heard over the hubbub. "Fuckin' Schneider got himself wasted last night." Jesse turned pale, shaking his head slowly from side to side as Grady continued. "Fuckin' guy was working late, and some fruitcake comes in and slices him up like a kielbasa. Right in the shower. They say there were bloody footprints all over the—"

But Jesse had already run off, his hand clamped over his mouth in a futile attempt to keep his breakfast from coming up.

"What's with him?" Grady asked Lisa, but the girl just stared at Jesse and wondered.

That night, an intruder visited the Walsh house.

Slowly, he climbed the long flight of stairs from the cellar and then continued upstairs to the second floor. On tiptoes, the intruder quietly passed by Jesse's bedroom and then paused before the room in which the boy's parents were fast asleep. He listened to Ken Walsh's loud snoring for a moment before continuing to Angela's room and quietly opening the bedroom door.

The little girl slept peacefully in her bed, oblivious to the shadow cast by the intruder who stepped between the girl and her night-light. Angela shifted her small body toward the center of the bed as a taloned glove reached out and pulled back the covers.

The intruder leaned forward, his breath hot on the slumbering child's soft neck.

"Wake up, little girl," he said, his voice hoarse and vaguely seductive.

Angela opened her eyes and looked into the intruder's face.

"What time is it?" she asked sleepily. Angela smiled sweetly as she gazed at her big brother, his face drenched with sweat and every muscle in his body tightly clenched.

"It's late," he whispered in his own familiar voice. He looked around, wondering what he was doing in Angela's room in the middle of the night. "Go back to sleep."

Angela nodded, closed her eyes, and instantly went back to sleep.

Jesse reached out to cover her and was startled to see the deadly glove of Freddy Krueger on his own right hand.

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Jesse spent the rest of the night in his room drinking black coffee and wondering how long a person could survive without sleep.

Chapter 8

Kerry Miller gazed at the gorgeous hunk swimming beside her in Lisa Poletti's oversize swimming pool and sighed.

Kerry knew that Lisa's parents had promised to go inside early tonight and leave her friends alone to party, but so far the Polettis were showing no signs of an early departure. Lisa's dad was still busy flipping hamburgers and hot dogs at the gas grill, wearing the ridiculous chef's hat and "Kiss the Cook" apron that he always wore on these occasions. The speakers were blaring out one of those goofy Benny Goodman records that Mr. Poletti always insisted on playing at his daughter's parties ("What's a party without the King of Swing?" Kerry once heard him ask in all seriousness), and the lights around the pool were much too bright for the kind of partying Kerry had in mind.

Lisa's mother gave her husband a sharp look as she stepped out of the house carrying a huge platter brimming with salads and condiments. Mr. Poletti pretended not to notice, but he knew that soon he would have to abandon his watchful post at the barbecue and leave the kids alone. Things had certainly changed since he was a young man. He didn't remember the bathing suits being quite that skimpy or the girls being quite so shapely when he was Lisa's age. And these boys Lisa knew! Half of them looked more like full-grown men than high school kids. There was something about the way these kids horsed around together that made Mr. Poletti very reluctant to go inside and leave this group of overactive teenagers unsupervised.

It was finally left to Mrs. Poletti to take her husband by the arm and forcefully remove him from the premises. With the greatest reluctance, the man in the oversize chef's hat turned over his spatula to one of the more responsible-looking boys before following Lisa's mother toward the house.

"We're going to bed now, dear," Mrs. Poletti informed her daughter while Mr. Poletti scowled at a muscular young man who was busy showing off his biceps to a couple of giggling girls in very skimpy bikinis.

"Thanks, Mom," said Lisa.

"Twelve-thirty," said her father in his sternest voice as he glanced at his watch. "Not one minute later."

"Twelve-thirty," agreed Lisa. "I promise."

"And don't forget to lock the gate!" shouted Mr. Poletti as his wife

literally pulled him into the house.

"Good night, Daddy," said Lisa. She smiled as her parents disappeared behind the sliding glass doors. She knew he meant well, but sometimes her father could be a real pain in the neck.

The responsible-looking boy with the spatula was thinking the same thing as he watched the Polettis go inside. He waited until he saw the lights go off upstairs before giving the prearranged signal to the girl waiting next to the cassette machine. Suddenly, Benny Goodman was gone and the hard rocking sounds of Van Halen were blasting through the speakers.

"Party time," announced a boy standing at the side of the house. He flicked off most of the lights around the pool while somebody pulled a wagon loaded with beer out of the bushes. Kerry waited until the underwater lights went off before slipping off her bikini top and pressing her young body against the hunk in the swimming pool. All around the pool, boys and girls were beginning to pair off, their hands and mouths eagerly exploring each other's bodies in the warm, dark night.

Jesse Walsh sat by himself in a lounge chair at the far corner of the patio with a troubled expression on his face.

By the time Lisa pushed her way through the crowd of dancing teenagers whose writhing bodies blocked her way, Jesse had disappeared into the portable cabana at the edge of the pool. Lisa knocked on the door and called his name.

"Just a minute." Jesse slipped on his pants and shirt before opening the door. Lisa walked in and shut the door behind her.

"I think I'd better go," said Jesse, avoiding Lisa's eyes as he buttoned up his shirt. "I'm just not into it tonight."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Lisa rested her hand gently on his back, but he shook it off and stepped away.

"Just leave me alone," he said. "Please."

"You're not being fair," said Lisa, joining Jesse on the wooden bench as he sat down to put on his shoes. "I'm worried about you. I want to help you get through this thing."

"What are you going to do? How can anybody help?" He looked at her with terrified eyes. "I'm going crazy, Lisa, and I don't want to have you watch me falling apart."

"It's okay, Jesse," the girl said, her hand on his shoulder.

"I don't know what to do," he said, clutching Lisa's hand tightly in his own. "I'm afraid to go to sleep and I'm afraid to stay awake. I don't know what's going to happen to me."

"We'll figure it out together," said Lisa. "We'll stay up all night if we

have to. I won't let anything happen to you. I promise."

He looked into her eyes, and she kissed him gently on the mouth. Then she kissed him again, only this time the kiss was a little harder. Jesse put his arms around Lisa and pulled her close. Their lips parted now, their mouths pressed together as they held each other tight. Jesse slipped off his shirt and felt the warmth of Lisa's flesh against his bare chest. Without speaking a word, they slid slowly but deliberately onto the cabana floor, deliciously lost in their boundless passion. Jesse felt Lisa's hand opening the snap on his jeans, sliding open the zipper as he kissed her on the gentle swell of breast that rose over the top of her swimsuit. Lisa closed her eyes, breathing hard as Jesse reached around to open the small hook at the back of her suit.

It was at that moment that Jesse saw the long, thick tongue dart out of his mouth, wiggling lasciviously in the air for just a moment before flicking back inside.

"What's wrong?" asked Lisa as Jesse pushed himself away and jumped to his feet.

"I have to go," he said, hastily tucking in his shirt. Lisa was still on the floor, looking very confused, as Jesse zipped up his jeans and ran out of the cabana.

Ron Grady was fast asleep when he felt the hand clamp down over his mouth.

The light clicked on to reveal the disheveled figure of Jesse Walsh.

"Jesus Christ," said Grady, glancing at the open bedroom window as he shook off Jesse's hand. "You scared the shit out of me!"

"Sorry," said Jesse. "I didn't know where else to go. You have to let me stay here tonight."

Grady looked at the clock on his night table and shook his head.

"This is important," Jesse continued. "Something really weird is happening. It started out like just bad dreams, but it's starting to get really serious."

"Go home," said Grady, feeling very tired and cranky. "Take a sleeping pill or something and call me in the morning." He flopped back on the bed and threw one arm over his eyes. "As a matter of fact, why don't you do the world a favor and take a whole bottle?"

Jesse sat on the edge of the bed and yanked Grady's arm away from his face.

"I killed Schneider," he said. Grady opened his eyes and stared at Jesse in disbelief. "Only it wasn't me," Jesse continued. "I was there, but it was like something moving around inside of me. Then last night it made me go into my sister's room, and tonight with Lisa …" He

paused, trying to remember exactly what had happened. “We were on the floor in the cabana and …” He stopped abruptly and grabbed Grady by the shoulder. “It wanted me to kill them,” he said, suddenly realizing what the horrible transformations had been all about.

Grady stared at him for a long time before offering his own analysis of the situation.

“You’re fucked in the head,” he said.

“I’m scared, Grady,” said Jesse, oblivious to the other boy’s skepticism. “I know it sounds crazy, but there’s something trying to get into my body.”

Grady shook his head and grinned lewdly.

“The only thing trying to get into your body is female and waiting for you on a cabana floor. And you want to sleep with me. Go figure!”

“Look,” said Jesse, “I don’t care if you believe me or not—”

“I believe you. You had some scary dreams, right?”

“No!” Jesse shook his head, no longer certain of what to believe. “I don’t know. Everything’s all mixed up. The important thing is that I’m in trouble and I need your help.”

Grady looked at Jesse and sighed. Trouble was something he understood.

“What do you want me to do?”

“Just watch me,” said Jesse. “If anything weird happens, like if I have a nightmare or I start walking in my sleep, you have to bring me out of it. Hit me over the head if you have to. Just don’t let me leave.”

Grady started to crack wise but thought better of it. Instead, he just nodded in agreement.

“And whatever you do,” Jesse added, settling himself into the chair next to the bed, “for God’s sake, don’t fall asleep!”

“Right,” said Grady, turning on the TV with his remote control. He was watching for less than half an hour when he became aware of Jesse’s soft snoring at his side.

“Sweet dreams, buddy,” Grady whispered as he turned off the TV. He watched Jesse sleeping peacefully for a moment and thought about what the boy had told him. It took Grady less than a minute to decide that only a real jerk would take Jesse’s crazy story seriously. He turned off the light and pulled the cover up over his shoulders to settle in for a good night’s sleep.

And then Jesse’s eyes snapped open.

“It’s happening again,” he said, flinging himself out of the chair and onto the floor. Grady was on his feet in an instant, but he didn’t know what to do for the boy who was now twisting and writhing on the bedroom floor, clutching his stomach and flailing about in unbearable

agony. Grady had never seen anyone throw a fit, but he knew that Jesse was suffering something far more intense than any ordinary seizure. From the look on his face, Grady guessed that Jesse felt like someone strapped into an electric chair at the moment the switch is thrown.

"Jesse?" he said, feeling more helpless and frustrated than he ever had before in his life. But Jesse just rolled silently on the floor, his body contorted as if every fiber of his being were undergoing some excruciating transformation. Then slowly he raised his right hand, his fingers extended and spread far apart.

Grady watched in horror as four razor-sharp blades emerged from within the tips of Jesse's fingers like new teeth breaking through a baby's gums.

Then, as if some crazed beast were tearing its way through his flesh, Jesse's skin began peeling away. Suddenly, his chest literally burst open as countless capillaries exploded in the air, a fine spray of blood forming a hazy crimson cloud around the figure that once was Jesse Walsh.

And out of that cloud stepped a man in a filthy red and green sweater, an evil grin on the disfigured face beneath his battered fedora.

For just one moment, Grady would have sworn that he saw Jesse's tormented expression covering the man's face like some obscene Halloween mask.

Grady made a quick break for the door, but his speed was no match for that of the creature in the dirty sweater. Lifting Grady by the throat, he cackled wickedly while the boy struggled in vain to free himself from the monster's iron grip. Grady's parents were already at the door, pounding on the outside while their son hung helplessly in the air on the other side.

The Gradys were still trying to break the door down when they heard the first of their son's screams. They jumped back as four sharp and reddened blades ripped through the wood, the blood of Ron Grady oozing from the knife holes as if the door itself were bleeding. The blades wiggled free and then pierced the door again as Ron Grady screamed for the last time, his vital organs already shredded beyond any hope of repair.

Inside the room, the man in the red and green sweater released his victim, watching as the boy's mutilated body slid lifelessly to the floor in a pool of his own blood.

And then Jesse looked at his reflection in the mirror and saw the evil face of Freddy Krueger leering back at him.

"You son of a bitch!" he shouted, pulling the blood-drenched glove

off his hand and hurling it at the mirror with all his might. “You killed him!”

The mirror cracked, but the face in the mirror was still laughing maniacally as Jesse fled screaming into the night.

Chapter 9

Lisa's party was still going strong when Jesse staggered to the Polettis' front door.

"Oh my God!" said Lisa as Jesse collapsed in her arms, his clothes torn and dirty and covered with blood.

"I killed him," said Jesse, still trying to make sense of it. "I killed them both."

Lisa held him tightly in her arms as the tears rushed to his eyes.

"I killed Grady," he said. "I killed Grady, and I killed Schneider too. Don't you see?" he said, his damp eyes widening with the horror of it. "The bastard is inside me!"

"What are you talking about, Jesse? Who's inside you?"

"He's just waiting to take me," Jesse said, still gasping for breath after the long run from Grady's house. "He gets me when I fall asleep."

"Who, Jesse?" Lisa persisted. "Who's waiting to get you?"

"Krueger," he said, spitting out the name like some foul curse. "Fred Krueger's been trying to get hold of me ever since I moved here. He needs me to get out of his world and into ours. He's been using me all along, and he's going to use me again."

"This isn't happening," said Lisa, looking Jesse hard in the eye and trying to make him understand the absurdity of what he was saying. "You're just confused. It's Schneider and the glove and the diary—"

"No!" he shouted, pushing her away in frustration. "You don't understand what I'm telling you! He tried to make me kill Angela last night. Look at my hands!"

He held out his bloody hands and started to cry again.

"I killed Grady," he repeated, trying desperately to make sense out of all the insanity. And then he realized the horrible truth. "He owns me," he said simply, staring at Lisa with eyes suddenly drained of all hope.

But Lisa was not prepared to surrender. She took him in her arms and held him close, stroking his wild hair as she spoke.

"Nobody's going to take you away from me," she said, her voice soft and reassuring. "There's got to be a logical explanation for everything. All we have to do is figure it out."

Then she remembered something Nancy Thompson had written.

“Wait a minute,” she said, leading Jesse into the study. She reached into a desk drawer and pulled out the red leather-bound diary. “Listen to this,” she said, flipping to the last entry. “He is evil itself,” she read, her voice trembling with excitement. “I know now that I brought him into my world. We all did. Our screams gave him all the energy he needed. Now I will take it back. Now I will deny him his energy.” Lisa closed the book and held it up for Jesse to see. “Nancy wasn’t crazy. All this really happened.”

Jesse shook his head from side to side, unable to absorb whatever it was that Lisa was trying to tell him.

“It’s true,” Lisa said. “You can fight him. Remember what I said about good energy and bad energy? Fred Krueger *is* bad energy. He thrives on our anger and our hatred and our fear. All we have to do is stop being afraid of him.”

Jesse was about to ask how they were supposed to do that when he suddenly felt the sharp pain in his stomach.

“He’s coming back!” he gasped, clutching his middle. “Get out of here, Lisa!”

At that moment, every window in the house slammed shut and locked. The dead bolt on the front door slid into place with a loud snap.

“Fight it, Jesse!” said Lisa, struggling not to be swallowed up by her own fear.

Upstairs, Mr. Poletti sat up with a start as the latch on the bedroom door snapped shut.

The temperature in the study had risen to well over a hundred degrees. Lisa’s clothes clung to her sweat-soaked body as she watched Jesse rolling in agony on the floor.

“You created him,” she said, shaking the boy and trying to make him understand. “You can destroy him. He lives off your fear, Jesse. You can fight him!”

“I can’t,” said Jesse, gasping for breath as Freddy struggled to push his way out.

In the living room, the water in the aquarium had begun to bubble. Three poached angelfish floated lifelessly to the surface.

Outside, Kerry was surprised to see a steamy mist rising from the surface of the swimming pool. Across the patio, a tray full of hot dogs had suddenly burst into flames. Moments later, the bulbs in the Japanese lanterns around the pool began to explode. A couple who tried to escape discovered that someone had padlocked the iron gate around the patio.

"You can't be afraid of him," Lisa screamed as Jesse writhed on the floor. "The bastard doesn't even exist!" But even as she spoke, she saw the four razor-sharp blades that were gouging deep channels on the edge of the desk to which Jesse clung.

The water in the aquarium came to a boil. The glass shattered, flooding the living room carpet with steaming water and dead fish. Then the TV came on for just a second before the picture tube exploded.

"Damned door is jammed shut," Mr. Poletti told his wife, yanking on the doorknob. The clock radio at the side of the bed had slowly begun to melt.

The water in the swimming pool had reached the simmering point, and choppy waves were breaking against the sides of the pool. Kerry and her new boyfriend were trying to climb to safety, but they were driven back by the hot, stormy waters. Tears were streaming down Kerry's face as she felt her skin begin to blister in the heat.

"He can't fight me," Freddy told Lisa, rising from the floor with a look of triumph on his horribly scarred face. "I'm Jesse now."

And then the creature in the red and green sweater was on his feet, his finger-knives gleaming in the lamplight. The awful glove swung toward Lisa, but the girl countered by catching the blades in the woolen afghan she snatched from the back of her mother's favorite chair. Before Freddy could plan his next attack, she lifted the heavy brass lamp from the top of the desk and brought it down over his head. As he stumbled backward, bellowing with rage, Lisa ran out of the study and slammed the door shut behind her.

"Jesse!" she shouted, reaching the front door only to discover that it was locked from the outside. She turned to run the other way and collided with the charging figure of Fred Krueger. While Lisa lay on the floor catching her breath, Freddy grabbed her by the foot and sank

his sharp teeth into her bare calf. Lisa screamed in pain and kicked him hard in the head with her other foot. She rolled away just as he brought down his steel talons, escaping to the kitchen while Freddy struggled to free his weapon from the oak floor in which it was now embedded.

Searching frantically through the kitchen, Lisa had succeeded in locating some weapons of her own. As Freddy burst into the room, she grabbed the heaviest and sharpest knife in her parents' collection of gourmet cutlery.

"Help me, Jesse!" she called, the fourteen-inch butcher's knife clenched tightly in her fist.

"I'm Jesse now," repeated Freddy, raising his own sharp blades and clicking them menacingly in the air. He smiled at the girl as if to acknowledge that she had put up a good fight. Lisa shook her head slowly from side to side, struggling to find the courage to drive her knife deep into the monster's heart.

And then she saw the change in Freddy's expression.

"Kill me!" he pleaded. "Please kill me!"

The voice coming from the creature's mouth was that of Jesse Walsh.

Lisa stepped back and lowered the knife. Suddenly a wicked grin came over Freddy's face, and the hoarse voice that issued from his twisted lips was once again his own.

"Go ahead, Lisa," he croaked. "Kill him!" He stepped forward, and Lisa swung her knife at him. Freddy laughed and jumped back, the blade just inches from his chest. He attacked again, and this time Lisa drove her knife deep into the monster's shoulder.

And now she was filled with rage, hating this grotesque beast for all the pain and suffering he had caused. Again and again, she plunged the knife into Freddy's retreating form, slowly driving him back across the room.

Then he spoke to her, his voice once again that of Jesse Walsh.

"Lisa," he said. "Lisa, I love you."

She was crying now, her knife raised high as tears streamed down her cheeks.

And then Freddy grabbed her wrist, and Lisa knew that Jesse was gone. The knife fell from her hand as the monster tightened his grip, his own glistening blades raised high for the kill.

"Please, God," she whispered, her eyes shut tight as she prepared to die.

And then she opened her eyes and saw Freddy staring at her with a look that was more to be pitied than feared. They stood there for what

felt like an eternity before the creature suddenly released her wrist and tossed her aside.

"No!" he shouted in a tortured voice that was not quite Jesse's but not quite Freddy's either. Lisa was still lying where the creature had thrown her when he let out a scream of unbearable pain and flung himself through the glass patio doors.

And as the glass shattered into a thousand shimmering pieces, Freddy Krueger disappeared.

Suddenly, the swimming pool ceased its violent swirling. Coughing and trembling, Kerry and her boyfriend climbed out, never before so happy just to be on dry land. Upstairs, the latch on the bedroom door snapped open. Mr. and Mrs. Poletti stepped into the hallway to breathe the cool, fresh air. The temperature throughout the house had dropped to a tolerable level almost as abruptly as it had risen. There was a long moment of silent relief as life suddenly returned to normal.

And then the ground below the patio began to shake and rumble, and the horrible figure of Fred Krueger came crashing up from beneath the concrete.

Lisa's friends screamed in terror as the sky suddenly darkened and the waters once again began to churn and boil. Freddy was laughing maniacally, his finger-knives raised high, as he grabbed kids at random and tossed them kicking and screaming into the boiling waters. Boys and girls were running in every direction now as Freddy lashed out wildly with his fingers of death. The patio was soon drenched with blood, and Lisa's guests began stumbling over the fallen bodies of their slashed and bloody friends in their desperate attempts at escape. Those who attempted to climb the chainlink fence surrounding the pool quickly discovered that the fence had turned untouchably hot as the shrubbery that was bursting into flame at the side of the house. His dark eyes gleaming with evil joy, Freddy lifted one of the boys high over his head, swinging him in the air before sending him flying into the gas grill with a bone-shattering crash. A huge tongue of flame shot high into the air as Freddy gleefully slashed out at his helpless victims.

"You are all my children!" he screamed, his arms raised high overhead in triumph.

Suddenly, a shotgun blast rang out from the living room, shattering the bowl of potato salad at Freddy's side.

Several teenagers ducked for cover as Mr. Poletti raised his pump-action shotgun again and prepared to blow Fred Krueger's head off.

"No!" screamed Lisa, knocking the barrel of the gun off target as the

second shell exploded harmlessly into the cabana wall.

“What the hell are you doing?” demanded Mr. Poletti, glaring angrily at his daughter.

But Lisa was not looking at her father. Lisa was staring at the creature in the red and green sweater who now studied her with an odd expression halfway between utter contempt and undying gratitude.

And then the sky lightened and the water stopped churning as the creature turned away and walked effortlessly through a brick wall.

“Where the hell did he go?” asked Mr. Poletti, looking down only long enough to reload his shotgun.

Lisa knew, but she didn’t answer.

By the time her father looked up, the girl was already gone.

Chapter 10

The hardest part of Lisa's trip to the old powerhouse was getting Jesse's Falcon to start.

Once she found the right wires to twist together and the right switches to throw in the makeshift car, it was relatively simple to wend her way along the twisted unlit roads that led to the abandoned generating plant.

Lisa had no idea how the man in the red and green sweater would manage to transport himself to his beloved boiler room, but she knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that he would be there when she arrived.

It was not until she pulled up to the building and shut off the engine that the wound in her leg began to throb. Lisa tore a strip of cloth from her shirt and wrapped it tightly around her calf where Freddy had bitten her before stepping out of the car.

A pair of wild dogs blocked the entrance to the powerhouse. The beasts growled deep in their throats as Lisa approached, and she could see the thick string of saliva that hung down from the powerful jaws beneath their sharp teeth.

"I'm not afraid," said Lisa aloud, forcing herself to believe her own words as she approached the heavy iron door. The growls turned to threatening barks as the dogs began snapping at Lisa's hands. "I'm not afraid," she said again, ignoring the vicious beasts and passing through unharmed.

She was in the power plant now, but the huge building looked vastly different than it had on her previous visit with Jesse. This time, the old pipes were alive with steam that leaked out from between rusty rivets and torn gaskets, and there was a constant pounding noise as the ancient expansion tanks steadily belched their rancid air. The room seemed bathed in an eerie blue light, and white-hot arcs of electricity flashed intermittently in the distant corners of the building. Lisa wondered how much of what she saw was illusion and how much was real. Touching her fingers to a large steam pipe, she quickly discovered that the heat of the pipes was very real indeed.

It suddenly occurred to her how lucky she had been to guess right about the wild dogs outside.

Lisa was studying her blistered fingers when she noticed that her injured leg had begun to ache. She casually reached down to rub the

wound and felt something move on her fingers.

Lisa looked down to find her makeshift bandage swarming with big, black carpenter ants. She screamed and, quaking with disgust, began brushing the ants away with both hands.

And then, as abruptly as they had appeared, the ants were gone.

Lisa stared at her blood-soaked bandage for a moment, took a deep breath, and continued her voyage into the bowels of the old boiler room.

She was halfway up the rusted iron stairway leading to the catwalk when she thought she heard the horrible sound of metal scraping against metal. She whirled around, prepared for the worst.

There was no one there.

She continued to climb until she reached the walkway. There to greet her was the same giant rat she and Jesse had encountered on their previous visit. It fixed her with its evil red eyes and showed its pointy teeth. “I’m not afraid,” Lisa said, but this time she didn’t believe her own words. The vicious creature who was about to leap at her was no illusion.

And then a large black cat appeared from nowhere and pounced on the unsuspecting rat. The cat stared at Lisa with strange yellow eyes as it slowly devoured the rat, the rodent’s tail protruding obscenely from its mouth while it slowly munched on the rat with loud, bone-crunching noises. Lisa felt herself on the verge of throwing up as she watched the rat’s long tail slowly slide past the cat’s pink lips and down its gullet. The cat chomped on its prey one more time, swallowed noisily, and then growled its satisfaction with a roar befitting a small mountain lion. Lisa gazed into the creature’s demonic eyes for a moment and knew for sure that this was no ordinary pussycat.

This was a pussycat that could devour a teenage girl as easily as it had consumed the rat.

She turned and ran, her footsteps clanging noisily on the steel-mesh flooring. She felt the catwalk begin to give way beneath her feet and grabbed hold of the iron handrail. Lisa was breathing hard now as she jumped to safety, running fast without knowing where she was going or what she would find when she got there.

And then she saw Freddy Krueger and began to scream.

“You had your chance,” he said, raising high his taloned glove. “Die now!”

Lisa ducked just in time as the finger-knives slashed out and scraped horribly against a steam pipe. She turned to run and saw that the walkway was now glowing, a steamy mist rising from its red-hot

surface.

There was nowhere to run.

There was nowhere to hide.

"Come to me, Lisa," Freddy croaked, a twisted smile on his ugly face. "I'm waiting for you."

"Stop him, Jesse," cried Lisa, fighting back her tears. "I know you're in there!"

"Jesse's dead," said the monster, stepping closer as he clicked his finger-knives in Lisa's face. "Freddy's here."

Lisa took a step back, but it was no use. She felt the sting as Freddy struck out, his blades just nicking the flesh of her shoulder.

"Jesse!" she screamed, trying desperately not to lose her faith.

"Wanna join your little friend?" asked Freddy. Lisa smelled the creature's foul breath and almost puked for the second time that day.

"Where's Jesse?" she demanded, forcing herself to sound more brave than she felt.

"There is no Jesse. I'm Jesse now."

"I want him back," she insisted. "Talk to me, Jesse. Jesse!"

Freddy just laughed, shaking his ugly head slowly from side to side. He raised his steel blades to Lisa's face, the sharp points almost touching her eyes. Lisa forced herself to look beyond the deadly blades, summoning all her remaining strength and courage to look directly into the creature's fearsome eyes.

"I love you, Jesse," she said, meaning it as she had never meant anything before in her life.

The monster stared at her, a look of doubt and confusion in his catlike eyes. His hand began to tremble slightly. He shifted his gaze to the glove on his right hand as if he weren't quite sure how it got there.

And then he began to bleed.

He was bleeding from the same shoulder and chest wounds that had refused to bleed when Lisa inflicted them back at the house. Now they were gushing, and Freddy stared in disbelief as blood poured down his chest and arms. Then the look of disbelief changed to one of weakness and pain as the bloody creature staggered back to lean against the iron railing.

Lisa dashed past him. She was about to run for safety when she heard Jesse's voice calling her name.

"Lisa," he said. "Come and get me."

She turned around and heard the ugly sound of Freddy's wicked laughter.

"Come and get him," he croaked, clicking his finger-knives in the

air, still leaning against the railing for support.

Lisa stepped toward him, suddenly more angry than frightened. The time for playing cat-and-mouse games had come to an end.

"I'm not afraid of you," she said, looking the bloody creature straight in the eye. "You couldn't kill Angela, and you can't kill me. Jesse's in there, and I want him back."

"Jesse's dead!" screamed Freddy, sounding less sure of himself than before. "I sliced him good!"

Lisa just shook her head and took another step closer.

"I'm going to take him away from you, and you're going straight back to hell."

"He's dead!" Freddy screamed, but Lisa just went on shaking her head.

"Come back to me, Jesse," she said, her eyes looking right through Freddy's. "I love you."

Freddy dropped to one knee as Lisa moved closer.

"I'll kill you!" croaked Freddy, but there was no conviction left in his voice. His blades clicked weakly at his side.

"He can't hold you, Jesse," said Lisa, ignoring Freddy's threats. "He's losing his grip. You can get out if you want to."

"He'll die with me," Freddy muttered. But Lisa just shook her head and knelt beside him. "He'll die with both of us," said Freddy as the girl took off his hat and began to stroke his head. Freddy lifted his right hand and pressed his glove against Lisa's chest. She felt the painful sting of the blades but made no move to escape. Instead she came in closer and touched her lips to his. The creature flinched and moved his talons to her back, but he was too weak to drive the blades home. He shivered as she embraced him, her mouth now pressed against his in a passionate, life-confirming kiss.

And then smoke began to rise from his body, and he pushed her away with a scream of excruciating agony. The noise of the ancient machinery was deafening now as the temperature in the room began to soar. Suddenly, a flame shot across the railing against which Freddy leaned, and small fires broke out along the catwalk. The paint on the walls began to bubble and peel as pipes everywhere started to burst. Valve wheels flew off and rolled noisily down flaming catwalks. Steam shot out from every punctured pipe as the entire boiler room filled with smoke and flame.

Lisa watched in mute horror as Freddy's flesh began to melt, his pain-racked features sliding off his exposed skull like wax dripping off a candle. And then he was on fire, his dense, all-engulfing flame becoming one with the fire that was rapidly consuming the entire

powerhouse.

And just as suddenly, the fires began to die out. In a matter of moments, the deafening noise began to abate and the smoke cleared. Big fires turned to little fires, which soon died down to harmless clouds of sooty smoke. A cool blue light suffused the vast boiler room.

Lisa looked at the charred and smoldering corpse of Freddy Krueger and gasped.

The blackened body had begun to stir.

Then the creature turned to her, but the singed and sooty figure that slowly rose to its knees was not the fiendish Freddy Krueger at all.

Jesse Walsh rose to his feet, his eyes glazed as if he were awakening at long last from a horrible and vaguely remembered nightmare.

Jesse kissed his mom good-bye just as the shiny new school bus pulled up to the curb. His right arm was in a sling and he still had some minor burns and bruises, but he was feeling about as good as he had ever felt in his life.

Jesse hurried onto the bus and saw Lisa waving at him from the back. A grin on his face, he made his way quickly down the aisle, shaking a hand or two as he greeted his admiring schoolmates.

"Hi," he said, giving Lisa a quick kiss before sitting down beside her. He draped his good arm around the girl's shoulder, careful to avoid the bandage that covered her still healing wound. Lisa returned his greeting and then chuckled.

"What's so funny?" asked Jesse.

"We must look like a couple of escapees from the veterans hospital," said Lisa with a smile.

Jesse laughed and shook his head. "I still can't believe we actually —"

Lisa cut him off in mid-sentence by putting a finger gently to his lips. He nodded in agreement.

Some things are better left unspoken.

"I love you," said Jesse, holding Lisa close.

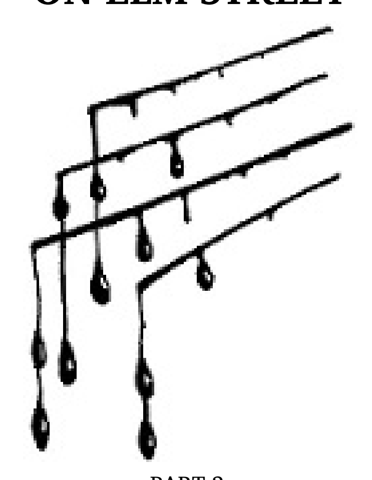
"I love you too," she said, gazing deeply into his eyes. They hugged, and Jesse's lips gently nuzzled the girl's ear.

Then they looked at each other again and Lisa closed her eyes. *This is what it's all about,* thought Jesse as he leaned forward to kiss her tenderly on the lips.

And at that moment, the taloned glove of Freddy Krueger ripped through Lisa's chest and thrust its razor-sharp blades toward Jesse's eyes.

Jesse was still screaming as the bus shifted into high gear, racing madly into the desert with flashing lights and sparking dashboard as the nightmare continued.

A NIGHTMARE
ON ELM STREET



PART 3:

The Dream Warriors

A novel by Jeffrey Cooper

Based on the screenplay by Wes Craven and Bruce Wagner

NEW LINE CINEMA,
MEDIA HOME ENTERTAINMENT, INC. and
SMART EGG PICTURES Present
A ROBERT SHAYE Production

**A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, PART 3:
DREAM WARRIORS**

Starring

HEATHER LANGENKAMP • PATRICIA ARQUETTE
LARRY FISHBURNE • PRISCILLA POINTER
CRAIG WASSON

Special Appearances by

JOHN SAXON and DICK CAVETT
And ROBERT ENGLUND as Freddy Krueger

Casting by ANNETTE BENSON c.s.a.
Executive Producers WES CRAVEN and STEPHEN DIENER
Line Producer RACHEL TALALAY
Executive in Charge of Production GERALD T. OLSON
Director of Photography ROY WAGNER
Co-Producer SARA RISHER
Written by WES CRAVEN and BRUCE WAGNER
Produced by ROBERT SHAYE
Directed by CHUCK RUSSELL

Chapter 1

Kirsten Parker looked at the clock on her nightstand and lowered her voice.

"He's so weird!" she whispered into the telephone, glancing nervously at the door to her bedroom. Kirsten never understood why her parents made such a big fuss about letting her use the phone late at night. It wasn't as if …

"Kirsten?" called the harsh voice from down the hall.

"Gotta go," said Kirsten. "See you tomorrow."

She hung up the phone and switched on the radio just before her mother entered the room.

"Your father and I are trying to get some sleep," said Mrs. Parker, glaring angrily at her teenage daughter.

"It's just the radio."

"Go to sleep!" said her mother, saving Kirsten the trouble of having to elaborate on her lie. "And stay off the damned telephone!"

The girl waited until her mother left the room before sticking out her tongue and making a terrible face.

She sighed deeply and lay back in bed. Sometimes she wondered if her parents would have been different if they didn't have so much goddamned money. She smiled grimly at the thought of all those kids at school who envied her because she lived in such a fancy house and always wore expensive clothes. If they knew what it was really like to be Kirsten Parker …

Kirsten turned off the light and closed her eyes, only half listening to the announcer on the radio as he droned on about the talk show that was scheduled for later that evening.

"… and the suicide rate among fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds has increased by an astonishing twenty percent. Why are our children killing themselves and what can we do about it? Join us on Talk Radio —"

But Kirsten never heard the station's call letters nor found out when the program would be on. In a few seconds she was fast asleep, and it was not until she felt the breeze in her hair and noticed the leaves falling on her face that she opened her eyes.

Kirsten wasn't in her room anymore.

She was still in her own bed, all right, but her bed was now out in

the middle of a deserted street. Kirsten climbed out of bed and found herself looking at an old house she vaguely remembered seeing before in a dream.

The house on Elm Street.

“Mother?” she whispered, not really expecting a reply.

And then she heard the children’s voices. She stepped closer and saw them, dressed in their finest party clothes as they jumped rope in front of the old house. The tune they were singing was strangely familiar, and Kirsten wondered where she ever could have heard those strange words before.

One, two, Freddy’s coming for you,
Three, four, better lock your door,
Five, six, grab your crucifix …

“What is this place?” asked Kirsten. One of the little girls looked up while the others scattered. Kirsten repeated her question, but the little girl just giggled and climbed onto the shiny red tricycle that stood in one corner of the cluttered lawn. With an eerie laugh, the girl pedaled into the house at incredible speed and disappeared.

For reasons she couldn’t possibly have explained, Kirsten opened the door and stepped inside. Startled by the harsh clanging of a wind chime, she looked up at the four metal tubes hanging in the doorway.

For a split second, they looked exactly like four long straight razors.

“Hello?” she said. The house was dark, but Kirsten could see by the moonlight shining through the broken windows that the room in which she now stood was completely empty except for a few dead leaves. Then she heard a metallic whirring noise coming from one of the back rooms. She stepped farther into the house and opened a large pair of sliding doors that she hadn’t noticed when she first came in.

The huge room was filled with hundreds of twisted tricycles, like some obscene parody of an automobile graveyard. Kirsten had barely noticed that the floor was awash with blood when a large, riderless bicycle rolled into the room. It was a bicycle built for two, with bloody spikes where its seats should be and two glistening straight razors for hand brakes.

And then she saw him in the shadows, the man in the red and green sweater. There was a grotesque grin on his burnt face as he crooned to her in a horrible, throaty voice that no songwriter on earth could ever have imagined—except, perhaps, in her worst nightmare.

“Kirsten, Kirsten, give me your answer, do. I’m half-crazy—”

Kirsten began to run, screaming as she descended what seemed to be an endless stairway, hurtling as fast as she could through the

darkness to put as much distance as possible between herself and the terrible man at the top of the stairs. At last, she came to the bottom of the stairs and staggered through a narrow doorway, gasping for breath.

She flipped on the light and saw the bodies of a hundred teenagers hanging lifelessly from the rafters, their eyes wide open and their purple tongues lolling obscenely from their mouths.

Kirsten screamed and turned around, crashing into the man with the red and green sweater. He was laughing triumphantly now as he held her in his arms, the razors at his fingertips cold against her neck.

"I have to wake up," she said out loud, determined not to join the gallery of death in the room behind her. "I have to wake up."

And then Kirsten was alone in her room. She jumped out of bed and stared at herself in the bedroom mirror through tears of fear and anger and frustration. For just a moment, she imagined the horrible man with the burnt face creeping up behind her, putting his terrible hands on her shoulders …

She knew he wasn't really there, that he was trapped in the dream she had barely managed to escape; but the mere thought of the evil creature with the razor-tipped glove was suddenly more than she could bear. Kirsten picked up a heavy paperweight from her dresser and heaved it at the mirror, shattering it into a dozen pieces. Then she fell to her knees, picked up the sharpest piece of glass she could find, and slashed it violently across her wrists.

Dr. Neil Guiness paused at the nurse's station and greeted the burly black orderly who stood there watching a local news report on the epidemic of teenage suicides.

"How's it going, Max?" asked the young psychiatrist.

"All quiet on the western front," the orderly replied. Max had been on night duty at the adolescent ward all that week, and he often thought he would have quit his grueling job at Westin Hills Psychiatric Hospital long ago if it weren't for a few good doctors like Neil Guiness.

"How's Kincaid?" asked Neil.

Max shrugged and shook his head from side to side.

"He's in the Quiet Room," he said.

Neil nodded and headed for the Quiet Room. He had never fully approved of strapping disturbed adolescents into the big metal chair bolted to the floor, but he had to accept the unpleasant fact that sometimes patients had to be forcibly restrained for their own protection. Still, he was constantly arguing with Dr. Maddalena about

what he considered to be her excessive use of the Quiet Room.

Come to think of it, he reflected with a grim smile, he seemed to argue with Dr. Maddalena about damned near everything these days. How that woman with her antiquated ideas ever came to run a modern institution like Westin Hills was something Neil never expected to understand.

Neil peeked in through the mesh-grid window of the Quiet Room and studied the boy struggling to escape from the heavy leather straps that bound his wrists and ankles to the steel chair. Sometimes it was hard to remember that Kincaid was just a seventeen-year-old boy. Standing well over six feet and weighing something in excess of two hundred and fifty pounds, Kincaid gave off an aura of menace even in his gentlest of moods. The fact that his bullet-shaped head was completely devoid of hair only contributed to the notion that this was someone you would be wise to avoid running into on a dark street corner.

Neil was about to open the door to the Quiet Room when he felt an icy hand on his shoulder.

"Not now, Doctor," said the hard voice of Dr. Maddalena. "We've just managed to calm him down."

Neil glanced at his boss for a moment and then looked back at the boy inside the room. He had specifically asked Dr. Maddalena not to medicate his patients unless absolutely necessary, but the older psychiatrist's notion of necessity seemed to differ consistently from his own. Sometimes Neil had the feeling that his boss was going out of her way to goad him into a showdown that they both knew he couldn't win. Neil was determined to put off that inevitable bit of unpleasantness for as long as possible. The kids needed him, and he was prepared to put up with a lot of bullshit if it meant keeping his job at Westin Hills.

"I imagine you've heard about the new assistant," said Dr. Maddalena, leading Neil away from the Quiet Room and into the doctors' lounge.

"I heard some kind of rumor about help from downtown," said Neil, pouring himself a cup of coffee.

"It's more than just a rumor, I'm afraid," said Dr. Maddalena. "Some of the parents have been complaining about the way we do things around here, and the city council decided we needed some community input."

"I just don't like the way this makes any of us look," said Neil in an uncharacteristic burst of anger. "We're all professionals around here. Don't credentials and experience count for anything in medicine anymore?"

"Perhaps in medicine," said Dr. Maddalena with a deep sigh, "but not in politics, which is what this ultimately boils down to. Anyway, there's nothing any of us can do at this point. The cavalry is on its way, and we'll just have to make the best of an unpleasant situation. I'm sure she won't get in anybody's way."

" 'She'?"

Before Dr. Maddalena could elaborate, Max came running into the lounge.

"We got another one in the E.R.!" he shouted. Neil and Dr. Maddalena instantly jumped up and raced toward the Emergency Room.

"Her name's Kirsten Parker," explained the nurse, struggling to hold down the girl who violently resisted every effort to staunch the flow of blood from her torn wrists.

"Get away from me, you bastard!" the girl screamed, her eyes glazed and her features contorted in fear and disgust.

Max rushed to Kirsten's side, using his considerable mass to steady the girl while one of the doctors attempted to stitch up her bloody wrists. Suddenly the girl twisted away, throwing Max across the room with a force that seemed to belie the considerable difference in their sizes. Flinging herself into the corner of the room, she knocked a tray of instruments to the floor and picked up a large pair of surgical scissors. From the way she held the scissors in front of her, no one in the room doubted that she would skewer the first person who dared to come near.

Neil prayed that the girl would not decide to turn the scissors on herself.

"No one's going to hurt you," he said, taking a tentative step forward. Kirsten jabbed at him with the scissors and he quickly stepped back. Neil stood there helplessly as the girl began to rock slowly from side to side, eerily singing to herself in a weak and trembly voice.

"… five, six, grab your crucifix.
Seven, eight, better stay up late.
Nine, ten …"

Suddenly, Kirsten stopped and stared at the figure that had appeared in the doorway.

"Never sleep again," said the voice of Nancy Thompson, completing Kirsten's rhyme.

Neil turned to see the young woman framed in the doorway, her eyes locked on those of Kirsten Parker.

Suddenly, Kirsten stopped rocking and her eyes cleared as she let the scissors drop to the floor. Suddenly drained of energy, the girl fell to her knees and began to cry. The doctors immediately rushed to her side, meeting with no resistance as they hastily treated her wounds.

“Who taught you that rhyme, Kirsten?” demanded Nancy, but the girl just sat on the floor, staring at Nancy as if suddenly rediscovering a long-lost friend.

The cavalry has arrived, thought Neil Guiness.

Chapter 2

"What was that all about?" asked Neil as he sat across from Nancy at the cafeteria table.

Nancy took a sip of hot black coffee and shrugged her shoulders.

"Just an old nursery rhyme," she said. "Something kids use to ward off the bogeyman."

"You believe in bogeymen?" asked Neil.

"Maybe," said Nancy with a smile. She was enjoying their flirtatious banter, especially after the tense scene in the Emergency Room. It had been a long time since Nancy had felt this comfortable with a man. She began to think about the first time she kissed Glen at the sophomore dance; then she forced herself to return to the present.

There was something about this handsome young doctor that made her want to tell him things—things she had not talked to anyone about for many years. Nancy was very glad that her professor had used his influence on the city council to get her this position at the hospital. When she decided to go for a degree in psychological counseling after … after what happened on Elm Street, Nancy swore that she would do whatever she could to help other young people in trouble. Getting this job at Westin Hills in the middle of a teenage suicide epidemic was like the answer to her prayers.

And meeting Neil Guiness was like icing on the cake.

"Tell me, Dr. Guiness—"

"Neil," he said with a gentle smile.

"Neil," said Nancy, returning the smile, "what do you think is going on around here?"

Neil considered a wisecrack and then thought better of it.

"It's hard to say," he replied with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "It could be environmental. Maybe drug-related."

"None of the kids—victims or survivors—was using drugs."

"There's a reason for everything," said Neil, a slight tone of annoyance creeping into his voice. He was beginning to like this young woman very much, but he didn't much like being reminded that he didn't have a clue to why young people were suddenly killing themselves off in unprecedented numbers.

"I'm sure there's a perfectly logical explanation," said Nancy soothingly. "I just can't figure out what the hell it could be."

“I used to work in a veterans’ hospital,” said Neil. “There’s something called Delayed Stress Syndrome that you see a lot in those kind of places that closely resembles what these kids seem to be going through.”

“Shell shock?” asked Nancy.

“In a manner of speaking. It’s like they’ve been in some sort of heavy combat and can’t quite figure out how to deal with it.”

“Combat,” echoed Nancy.

“Right,” said Neil, feeling vaguely annoyed by the imprecision of his diagnosis. “The vets get better eventually, and these kids will, too.”

“I wouldn’t count on it,” said Nancy.

“Is that your professional opinion, Doctor?” asked Neil sarcastically.

Nancy looked him in the eye and saw that this was neither the time nor the place to tell him her own admittedly bizarre-sounding theory of what was going on.

“I’m tired,” she said. “We’ll talk more in the morning.”

“Whatever you say,” replied Neil.

“One more thing,” said Nancy as she rose to leave. “Do any of these kids have nightmares?”

“Funny you should ask,” said Neil, caught off guard by Nancy’s perceptive question. “I’ve hooked them up to the EEG machine, and none of them seems to have REM sleep.”

“You mean …?”

“They don’t dream,” said Neil, nodding his head. “I almost get the impression they’re afraid to dream.”

Nancy was about to tell Neil something very important about her own experience in the world of dreams when she accidentally knocked over her purse. Neil bent down to help her pick up the spilled contents and paused over a bottle of large yellow pills.

Hypnocyl, 60 mg, read the label.

Nancy snatched the bottle out of his hands and put it back in her purse.

“Good night, Doctor,” she said, suddenly feeling more than a little uneasy.

“Good night,” he said. He waited until Nancy was out of sight before taking a pad out of his jacket pocket and jotting down the name of her medication.

Neil had to look in the latest supplement to his pharmaceutical reference book to find any mention of Hypnocyl.

Experimental, cautioned the text. *Effective for the management of the manifestations of psychotic disorders. Possibly effective for sedation where*

dreamless sleep is considered optimal and for suppression of night terrors.

Neil closed the book and made a mental note to remember that all of Nancy Thompson's observations about mental health did not necessarily come out of an introductory psych book.

Kirsten Parker went to sleep that night clutching a crucifix tightly to her chest.

She had never considered herself especially religious. The Parker family had always gone to church on the major holidays and given generously to all the right charities, but somehow the discussion of spiritual matters had never been a central feature of the family's religious life. Still, Kirsten clung to the belief that there had to be something out there bigger and more important than just our brief lives on this tiny planet tucked away in an obscure corner of the galaxy. She had never been able to share her mother's disdain for people who espoused unconventional religious viewpoints. Whether they chose to call the universal life-force Allah or Tao or The Great Hunka-Munka, Kirsten figured everybody was basically talking about the exact same thing.

As she began to get sleepy, Kirsten glanced at the tiny figure on the crucifix and wondered if Christ had suffered as she herself was now suffering. She closed her eyes, feeling warm and secure in her confidence that God, whatever She might turn out to be, was watching over her as she slept.

And while Kirsten slept, the figure on the crucifix began to writhe in pain, its eyes glowing red like two tiny hot coals. Kirsten awoke suddenly to the sound of a squeaky wheel. She looked across the room and saw a tricycle slowly melting as if from some intense inner heat. Kirsten climbed out of bed and walked through the door, knowing even as she did so that she would soon be back in that strange house that haunted her dreams every night.

The house on Elm Street.

And she knew too that she had to pass through that all-too-familiar living room until she found the cellar door, and that she would open the cellar door, and that he would be there as he always was, as large as life and ten times as ugly.

"Did you cross yourself today?" asked the man with the burnt face, leering at Kirsten as he crossed himself with his razored glove, blood and pus oozing from his rotting skin. Kirsten began to scream, the man in the striped sweater just a few steps behind, as she ran up the stairs in terror.

And then she was alone in a dark corridor. There was a doorway at

the end of the hall, and Kirsten felt compelled to step inside the simply furnished room. She only took one step before sinking through the room's liquid floor, gasping for breath as the furniture somehow remained suspended on the unsolid floor above her. She swam with difficulty to the surface, grabbing hold of a chair as her head broke the surface. She only had time to take one quick breath before a razored hand shot up from somewhere below, pulling her back into the murky waters. Kicking and squirming, Kirsten broke free and, with a tremendous burst of will, struggled to solid ground.

And then the creature reappeared from beneath the water, only now it took the form of a horrible serpent with the leering face of the man in the red and green sweater.

"Help me!" cried Kirsten as the disgusting creature cornered her at the end of the upstairs hallway, its razor-sharp fangs already closing over her ankles. "Nancy!"

Nancy was sitting up in bed writing in her diary when the pen suddenly jumped out of her hand and the diary went flying across the room. She barely had time to wonder what was going on before she was pulled down into the center of her bed …

… only to crash through an enormous mirror in her old house on Elm Street.

Nancy scrambled to her feet and looked around. What in the world was she doing in her old house?

And then she heard Kirsten's screams.

Without a moment's hesitation, Nancy ran down a seemingly endless series of corridors until she found the screaming girl swallowed up to her neck by a giant serpent with the face of Freddy Krueger.

The huge snake stopped swallowing for just a second to study Nancy with its watery yellow eyes. A smile seemed to play across its wide, leathery lips.

"What am I doing here?" screamed Nancy in frustration as she clawed angrily at the creature's burnt face with her fingernails.

"You're in my dream!" gasped Kirsten helplessly. "I brought you here to help me!"

"Then wish us out of here!" said Nancy, jamming her thumb hard into the creature's eye. Kirsten nodded and took a deep breath just as Freddy's dislocated jaw began to close over her face.

"I wish we were back in our own beds," she said.

And as Freddy's jaws closed on empty air, Nancy found herself plummeting into the safety of her own bed. She looked around warily and saw the open bottle of pills on her nightstand. With a sudden intense fury, she picked up the bottle and hurled it violently against the wall.

"Damned pills don't work anymore," she said, collapsing on the bed in tears.

It wasn't until she buried her face in her hands that she noticed the charred shreds of burnt human flesh that still clung to her fingernails.

Chapter 3

Nancy didn't especially like Kirsten's mother, and she knew at once that the feeling was entirely mutual.

What was it about people with money that made them so insensitive to their children's needs? Of course, Nancy knew it wasn't fair to overgeneralize in a case like this. She had known rich people who were excellent parents too, but there seemed to be a whole lot of people out there like the Parkers who seemed to think that buying expensive presents for their kids was all it took to qualify them for Parent of the Year.

"Frankly," said Mrs. Parker, quickly signing the hospital admitting forms that Nancy had brought to her house, "I can't help thinking that this whole thing has been blown way out of proportion. Kirsten has always been a child who's sought attention, and now she's got it. Well, she's not going to get it from me."

"I'm sure of that," muttered Nancy.

"Pardon me?"

"Nothing. Was Kirsten acting any different before she made the attempt on her life?"

"Not that I'd noticed. But, then, I've been rather busy lately." Mrs. Parker sighed and straightened a cushion on her exquisite moiré couch. "After all, one has one's responsibilities to one's community, hasn't one?"

Nancy clenched the arm of her chair and refrained from answering the woman's rhetorical question. This was neither the time nor the place to lecture Mrs. Parker on where her primary responsibilities lay.

"Did she have any nightmares that you know of?"

"Only when I took away her charge cards," Mrs. Parker replied with an unpleasant smile. "I really don't see what you want from me."

"What I want from you—" Nancy stopped herself and took a breath. "I'm just looking for some answers. It's not just Kirsten, Mrs. Parker. There've been other kids. Good kids with serious problems. I'm just trying to help them."

Before Mrs. Parker could reply, her husband abruptly entered the room. Nancy was sure that the well-tanned man in the expensive tennis outfit had been listening in from the next room.

"It was nice of you to bring the papers here, Miss Thompson," he said, "but if everything is arranged for Kirsten's stay in the hospital,

we really must be getting to the club."

"My first tennis tournament," said Mrs. Parker brightly.

"How nice," said Nancy through clenched teeth. She checked the papers in her hand and saw that everything had been properly signed. There seemed no point in continuing the conversation. "Are Kirsten's clothes ready?"

"Of course," said Mrs. Parker. "Teresa said there was a suitcase ready in her room." Mrs. Parker called out for the maid, but there was no reply. "Siesta time, I suppose," she muttered in disgust.

"I'll go up and get it, if that's all right," said Nancy, curious to see Kirsten's room.

"First door on the left." Mrs. Parker gestured vaguely toward the stairs. "Please be quick about it."

Nancy nodded and walked briskly up the marbled stairway.

Kirsten's room looked very much like the room of any girl her age, with a casual warmth and sense of humor to it that was conspicuously absent from her mother's expensively furnished living room. Nancy picked up the fine leather suitcase from the bed and was about to leave when she noticed the model house on the table across from Kirsten's bed.

Then she blinked her eyes and looked again.

The doll-size house on Kirsten's table was a perfect replica of Nancy's old house on Elm Street.

Nancy stared at the house for a long moment before crossing the room for a closer look. Granted, there were a few small differences: The color was wrong, and there was a tiny sign over the front door that read "Hathaway House." Still, there was no doubt in Nancy's mind that this was an incredibly accurate scale model of the house she had lived in for most of her life.

The house her mother had died in only a few short years ago when …

Nancy closed her eyes and forced herself not to think about it. She tucked the model under one arm, picked up the suitcase, and climbed back down the stairs.

"Kirsten asked me to bring this," she lied.

"Doesn't surprise me," said Mrs. Parker, now looking slightly ridiculous in her tennis whites. "The girl's been obsessed with that thing for weeks now. Frankly, I didn't even know she was interested in architecture."

There are a lot of things we both don't know about your daughter, thought Nancy as she said good-bye and headed back to the hospital.

"About those pills ..." Neil said as he walked with Nancy toward the Group Therapy Room.

"What pills are those?" she asked, although she knew perfectly well what he was referring to.

"The Hypnocyl," said Neil.

Nancy shrugged.

"What about them?" she asked.

"Who prescribed them for you? Do you know that they're still considered experimental?"

"Don't worry about it," said Nancy. "I'm not taking them anymore. Damned things stopped working."

Before Neil could ask any more questions, Nancy joined Dr. Maddalena and the kids from the ward in the Group Therapy Room. She ignored the older woman's dirty look and sat down on one of the chairs that had been arranged in a circle in the middle of the room.

Nancy had never seen such a weary-looking group of teenagers before.

"I hope to get to know each of you individually over the course of the next few days," said Neil, sitting down in the last of the empty chairs. "You all know Dr. Maddalena, of course. The young lady to my left is our newest staff member, Nancy Thompson. My name is Neil. Before we get started, why don't we all just introduce ourselves?"

"Fuck this," said Kincaid, leaning forward belligerently in his chair.

"Do you have a middle name?" asked Neil.

Everyone laughed, and even Kincaid seemed to relax a little.

"Kincaid," he said, leaning back with a grin.

"My name is Taryn," said a pretty fifteen-year-old girl with chocolate-brown skin. "I am fire."

"In this kingdom, I am called Laredo," said the boy sitting next to her. "Here, I am flesh. There: metal, rope, and ectoplasm."

"Jennifer," said a blond girl of about sixteen. Neil found her brief answer curiously refreshing. He waited a moment for the withdrawn-looking boy sitting next to Jennifer to speak and then asked him his name.

"That's Joey," said Jennifer. "He doesn't talk. He used to be a debater in school, but he hasn't spoken to anyone since he's been here."

Neil nodded and turned to the last boy in the group, who identified himself as Philip.

"I walk in my sleep," the boy added. He opened his mouth as if he were going to say more but then shook his head and looked away.

“It’s good to meet all of you,” said Neil. “I know it’s late and we’re all tired, but I’d like to try an experiment before we call it a night. Has anyone here ever been hypnotized?”

“More bullshit,” said Kincaid.

“Does it scare you?” asked Neil.

“Nothing scares a Brother of the Dream!” said Laredo.

Neil smiled weakly and nodded his head.

“You’ve all had bad dreams,” he continued, “and I think some of you are having trouble remembering exactly what the dreams have been about. If we can just get a handle on your nightmares—”

“I’d like to try,” said Kirsten.

“Good,” said Neil, glancing briefly at Dr. Maddalena before continuing. “I’d like you to close your eyes now, Kirsten. Just listen to my voice and relax. Forget about everything but the sound of my voice. Let the walls of the room fall away. There’s nothing here but you and the sound of my voice. Now, as you begin to relax, I want you to remember what happened before you tried to hurt yourself. I’m going to start counting backwards from five to zero, and when I reach zero I want you to tell me exactly what happened that day.” Kirsten nodded, her breathing slow and regular. “I’m going to start counting now. Five, four, three, two, one, zero …”

“I’m doing my homework,” said Kirsten, her eyes now lightly closed and her features perfectly relaxed. “It’s late and I’m very tired. I fall asleep. And now I’m in the dream. I can see the house. There’s a terrible smell …”

“Go on,” said Neil, surprised to see that the others had also closed their eyes and were nodding in agreement.

“It’s his face,” said Kirsten, her voice trembling slightly. “It’s all burned and scarred. And he’s after me. He says he’s going to hurt me real bad! I won’t let him! I’ll wake up!”

“Listen to me, Kirsten,” said Neil, alarmed by the terror in the girl’s trembling voice. “I’m going to count backwards again—”

“He’s hurting the children!” shouted Kirsten.

“I’ll get him,” said Taryn, her eyes shut tight. “I’ll burn him with my fire!”

“I need help!” shouted Jennifer.

“Don’t worry,” said Laredo. “With my golden sword shall I slay the Wicked One.”

“Grab on to my legs!” said Kincaid, his eyes still closed as he leaped to his feet. “I’ll fly us to safety.”

“Look out for the claw!” warned Philip.

"Motherfucker!" screamed Joey, diving across the room at some invisible assailant.

Nancy watched in silence as Neil and Dr. Maddalena attempted to restore some semblance of order. It wasn't until Kirsten abruptly vomited that the spell seemed to be broken. In that instant, all eyes opened and the six young people fell back to their seats totally exhausted.

Nancy had the strangest feeling that she could have helped them if only she had dared to close her eyes.

"Are you okay?" whispered Nancy.

Kirsten sat up in her hospital bed and nodded her head.

"Getting better," she replied, speaking softly so as not to disturb Taryn, who slept peacefully in her bed across the room.

"I brought you something from home." Nancy set the model house down on the girl's nightstand.

Kirsten looked at the model for a long time before turning back to Nancy.

"Why did you bring that?" she asked.

"Why did you make it?" answered Nancy.

Kirsten shrugged and averted her eyes.

"Maybe I want to be an architect," she said.

"Maybe," said Nancy. "But why this particular house?"

"I just made it up," said Kirsten. "It's not any special house."

"It's special to me," said Nancy. "I grew up in this house. Right near here, on Elm Street."

Kirsten stared at her in genuine bewilderment.

"But this is the house I dreamed about," she said.

"When did you first see it?"

"I've never seen it," said Kirsten. "Except in my dreams."

Nancy stared at the girl for a long moment and then shook her head slowly from side to side.

"I had a dream the other night," Nancy began.

"I know," said Kirsten. "I meant to thank you."

"Are you saying …?"

"It really happened," said Kirsten. "I pulled you into my dream. That's my gift."

"Your gift," echoed Nancy, trying to make sense out of the girl's words.

"All the kids have gifts," said Kirsten. "I think that's why we've

survived this long.”

“Did you ever do anything like that before?” asked Nancy, still trying to grasp the awesome implications of being pulled inside someone else’s dream.

“Just with my brother,” said Kirsten. “When I was little, sometimes I’d make him help me when I was having a bad dream. He never remembered anything in the morning, though. I was never really sure it had happened. Until now.”

“The man who was chasing us,” said Nancy, her mouth suddenly very dry. “Have you dreamed of him before?”

“I think so,” said Kirsten, paling slightly. “It’s hard to remember.”

“I know.” Nancy placed a hand gently on Kirsten’s forearm. “Why do you keep dreaming? The others have stopped.”

“I always thought I could get away,” said Kirsten. “Now I’m not so sure.”

“Do you think,” said Nancy, involuntarily tightening her grip on the girl’s arm, “do you think you could pull him out of a dream? The way you pulled me in?”

“No way!” said Kirsten, suddenly releasing herself from Nancy’s grip. “I don’t ever want to see that creep again!”

“I’m afraid,” said Nancy with a sigh, “you may not have any choice about that.”

Chapter 4

"You drink a lot of coffee," said Neil.

Nancy shrugged as the waitress in the coffee shop refilled her cup.

"Habit I got into"—she hesitated—"when I was in high school. So … you have a private practice when you're not at the hospital playing savior?"

"Sure," said Neil. "I interpret dreams at a local carnie."

"They pay you in popcorn?"

"Some. Mostly I get a hundred bucks an hour."

"People pay you to tell them about their dreams?"

"Are you kidding?" Neil said, not noticing the serious tone that had crept into Nancy's voice. "For a hundred dollars an hour, I dream *for* them."

"That's a good idea," said Nancy, staring off into the distance.

"What's that?"

"Paying someone to have your dreams."

There was an awkward moment of silence before Neil spoke once again. "Your folks still live around here?" he asked.

"My mom's dead," said Nancy a little too quickly. "She died in her sleep."

"Sorry," said Neil.

"My father disappeared, right around the time my mother died. I tried to find him for a long time. Traveled all over. Then I came back." Nancy paused and looked Neil straight in the eye. "I used to have bad dreams," she said.

Neil nodded and took a sip of coffee. Sometimes he wondered how people ever talked at all without coffee to sip during the awkward pauses between topics.

"Dr. Maddalena said you had some experience with kids who were hurting themselves."

"There was some trouble on Elm Street years ago. Some people died. Nothing on this scale, though." Nancy looked up and put her hand on Neil's wrist across the table. "Do you believe in other realities?" she asked.

"You mean like the Wizard of Oz?" asked Neil with a grin.

"Forget it," said Nancy, withdrawing her hand.

“Hey, I’m sorry,” said Neil, genuinely regretting his flip remark. “I was only joking.”

“Don’t patronize me, Neil,” said Nancy angrily. “There are things I have to tell you about these kids. Important things.”

“Terrific,” said Neil. “Only let’s not talk here. Why don’t we go over to my place, break out a bottle of semi-expensive wine, and have a serious talk?”

“I don’t drink,” said Nancy.

“Instant coffee, then. How’s that sound?”

Nancy smiled in spite of herself. Neil Guiness could be infuriating, but Nancy didn’t seem to be able to stay mad at him for more than a few moments at a time.

It wasn’t until they were at his house and she told him about the model that she found in Kirsten’s room that he really made her angry.

“All right,” said Neil, adding a carefully measured spoonful of sugar to his coffee cup. “For the sake of argument, let’s suppose she never saw the house on Elm Street before. And somehow she builds a perfect model of the house you lived in when you were a kid. So what does it prove?” He took a sip of coffee and shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe she’ll grow up to be your real estate agent.”

“You’re not being funny,” said Nancy, deciding that perhaps the time had come to tell him the whole incredible story. “Something really amazing happened last night. While I was home in bed, Kirsten was in the hospital having a nightmare.”

“This is getting scary,” said Neil with a big grin on his face.

“You know something?” said Nancy, now thoroughly annoyed by Neil’s flippant attitude. “You may have advanced degrees up the ass, but you don’t know anything about people!” She jumped to her feet and started heading for the door.

“Wait a minute!” said Neil, chasing after her. “I was only—”

“You don’t really care what’s wrong with these kids,” said Nancy, suddenly wheeling around and pointing an accusing finger at him. “You just want to get everything under control, get your gold star, and go home.”

“That’s bullshit, and you know it,” said Neil. “I care just as much as you do. I just don’t happen to think that it’s such a great idea to start believing in my patients’ delusions.”

“There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Neil Guiness.”

“Okay,” said Neil, reluctantly conceding the point. “Maybe I’m not always as open-minded as I could be. A person gets kind of cynical after a few years in med school. But I’m trying. Give me another

chance, would you?"

Nancy glared at him for a long moment, sighed deeply, and sat down.

"Pour me another cup," she said.

Most of the time, Max enjoyed working at Westin Hills.

Not that being an orderly in a county mental hospital was the greatest job in the world. The pay was lousy and the hours were worse. Still, working at the hospital made Max feel as if maybe he were doing somebody some good, and that was more than he could say about any other job he'd ever had in his life.

Having Doc Guiness around made a big difference, too. The doc really cared about these kids, and he seemed to share Max's belief that you can't always go by the book. Helping the kids get better was the important thing, and rules and regulations were only there to be used or ignored, depending on what was best for the kids at the moment.

Unfortunately, Dr. Maddalena didn't seem to see things the same way. As far as Max could tell, the Dragon Lady believed that rules and regulations were the end-all and be-all of running an institution. If the kids had to suffer, so be it. Patients come and go, but the hospital is forever.

Max felt like wringing Doc Maddalena's scrawny neck sometimes when she treated the kids as though they were case studies in some kind of psychiatric textbook. Max never finished high school, but there was no doubt in his mind that he knew more about people than the Dragon Lady ever would, despite all her fancy degrees and diplomas. He sometimes wondered why God in His infinite wisdom gave people like Dr. Maddalena the power to hire and fire honest, hard-working guys like him and Doc Guiness.

Max tried not to worry about the world's many injustices that night as he made his evening rounds. Thinking of such things just made him angry, and more anger was the last thing these kids needed to deal with. Nighttime in hospitals is tough for everyone, and the kids in Adolescent seemed to have it especially rough after lights-out. To Max, sleep meant a welcome relief after a hard day's work, a time to set his problems aside and refresh himself for a new day to come. It was different for these kids. He had the feeling that they were all afraid to sleep, and he was sure Doc Guiness could help them if somebody could just figure out why.

Until then, it was Max's job to make sure they all got through the night as best they could.

"Lights out, gentlemen," he said, knocking lightly but firmly on the

door to Joey and Laredo's room.

"But, Max …" Laredo began to protest.

"I know," said Max with a gentle smile. "You don't sleep. Well, neither does Doc Maddalena, and she'll have my black ass in a sling if she comes around and sees lights on after hours."

Max felt a special fondness for these two kids. Joey couldn't have been more than fifteen, his body already frail and twisted like that of an old man. Laredo wasn't much older, but he always looked out for the younger boy, more like a big brother than a hospital roommate.

What really amazed Max about Laredo, however, was his incredible imagination. Laredo seemed to dwell in a world of magic and fantasy, spending endless hours forging the tiny clay figures of wizards and kings and monsters that filled his side of the room. Max loved to listen in when Laredo entertained Joey and the others with his complex sagas of enchanted castles and fearless warriors. He was sure the boy knew the difference between reality and his own vivid imaginings, yet his magical tales were woven with such conviction that sometimes even Max forgot they weren't real.

Joey's side of the room looked practically empty next to Laredo's. The only decorative item on Joey's nightstand was the remarkable model house that the Parker girl had given him. There was something almost frighteningly real about that house, Max thought—as if Kirsten had been driven to reconstruct some actual house down to the last minute detail.

"Max?" said Laredo, interrupting the orderly's thoughts. "Can I go get my clay out of the Arts-and-Crafts Room?"

"Make it fast," said Max, nodding his head. Max didn't know exactly what was troubling Laredo, but he knew the boy needed to make his tiny clay figures to maintain his sanity. "Sweet dreams, Joey," said Max, gently mussing the boy's bushy hair. Then he turned off the light and moved on down the hall to Kincaid's room.

The huge boy's frail young roommate, Philip, was already fast asleep.

"Hey, Max," said Kincaid, nodding his head in Philip's direction, "I think the kid's starting to walk in his sleep again."

"As long as he brings back coffee and doughnuts," said the orderly. Kincaid laughed as Max turned off the light. Max tried not to let the kids see him worrying, but sleepwalkers were actually one of his greatest concerns. Max couldn't be everywhere all the time, even if the Dragon Lady expected him to be. If a sleepwalker slipped past him one night and got himself hurt, Max didn't know what he would do. It was something he tried not to think about.

Max was no longer worrying about sleepwalkers an hour later as he

sat in the staff lounge watching TV. Maybe if he hadn't been laughing quite so hard at Johnny's monologue that night, he might have heard Philip's soft footsteps as the boy lurched past the doorway behind him. He certainly would have noticed the stiff, unnatural way in which the boy was walking, like a poorly constructed marionette operated by an inexperienced puppeteer. Carefully, Max would have guided the boy back to bed, shut the door behind him, and made it back to the lounge before Johnny introduced his first guest.

What he would not have seen was the leering figure of Fred Krueger guiding poor Philip every uncomfortable step of the way, his strong hands hooked under the boy's armpits and his tattered shoes wedged beneath the boy's bare feet. Only Philip knew that it was the evil man in the filthy sweater who yanked him from his bed each night, forcing him to lurch awkwardly through the darkened hallways in his ill-fitting hospital pajamas.

"Why?" the boy had asked the first time, nauseated by the dreadful stench of his tormentor's burnt flesh. "Why me?"

"Why?" Freddy had replied, grinning as he drooled unconcernedly on the back of Philip's neck. "Because I *like* you!"

Laredo was not asleep the night Freddy waltzed Philip past the doorway of the TV lounge. He had stayed longer than he had meant to in the Arts-and-Crafts Room that night and happened to peek out the door just as Philip lurched by. He was about to go to the boy and steer him back to his room when something very odd happened.

For just one fleeting instant, Laredo thought he saw the man in the red and green sweater standing behind Philip.

He blinked his eyes and took another look. The image had flashed by so quickly that Laredo didn't know whether he had actually seen someone or just imagined it. Laredo was well aware of his own overactive imagination, and he often thought of the weird man who used to haunt his nightmares.

Back when he used to sleep at night.

It had seemed so real, and yet …

And then he saw it again. It only lasted a fraction of a second, but there was no doubt in Laredo's mind that Philip was not alone.

Especially after the boy passed through an unopened door.

"Kincaid," said Laredo, shaking the large boy out of his sleep.

Kincaid opened one eye.

"This better be good," he growled threateningly. Then he looked across the room and saw Philip's empty bed.

"Come with me," said Laredo. Kincaid grumbled a few of his favorite obscenities and followed the smaller boy out into the hallway.

They raced quietly down the corridor until they reached a window at the end of the hall.

Philip was about to step off the curb in front of a speeding ambulance.

“Leave him alone!” screamed Kincaid, punching his fist through the locked window as the laughing man in the red and green sweater flung Philip in front of the onrushing vehicle.

Chapter 5

"**I** want to talk about what happened to Philip last night."

Neil looked around the room, wondering who would speak first. Philip's accident had affected the rest of the kids more powerfully than he had expected. None of them had seemed especially close to the boy in life, and yet they all seemed to be responding to his death as if it were some sort of personal insult.

According to Max, every kid in the ward began crying and hollering at the moment of Philip's death.

"He wasn't strong enough," said Kincaid, breaking the silence. The others nodded in agreement. "He couldn't handle it, so he got wasted."

"He showed his weak side to the Sorcerer," said Laredo, "so the Evil One killed him."

"Nobody killed Philip," observed Dr. Maddalena. "He was a sleepwalker, and sometimes—"

"Bullshit!" interrupted Kincaid. "The bastard murdered him."

"It's true," said Taryn. "Kirsten can tell you."

"Kirsten?" said Nancy. "Can you take us to him?"

Dr. Maddalena glared at Nancy and then turned her questioning gaze on Neil. Neil just shook his head and shrugged in bewilderment.

"Kirsten?" repeated Nancy.

"He's in the house," said Kirsten, her eyes tightly shut. Joey began to tremble and buried his head in Kirsten's lap. "He wants us to come —"

"Dr. Guiness," said Dr. Maddalena, "I'd like to speak to you outside for a moment."

Neil reluctantly followed Dr. Maddalena outside.

"I think we should increase their medication," she said when they were alone.

"No!" said Nancy, stepping into the hallway uninvited to join the conversation.

"And why not, *Miss* Thompson?" said Dr. Maddalena with a condescending smile.

"Because it'll lower their defenses," said Nancy. "They'll start dreaming again."

"Exactly," said Dr. Maddalena. "That's probably all they need to

release all this negative energy."

"Neil ...?" pleaded Nancy.

Neil glanced at Dr. Maddalena for a moment and then turned back to Nancy.

"Studies do show that we all have to dream sooner or later," he said. "It's dangerous not to."

Nancy glared at him furiously and then stalked back to the Group Therapy Room.

Neil wondered, not for the first time, if maybe the woman he loved belonged on the hospital's patient list and not on its payroll.

"I think it's time you all knew who was trying to kill you," said Nancy. The time had come at last to tell the kids the whole truth.

"Don't humor us," said Jennifer.

"He wears a brown hat," said Nancy. Everyone looked at her. "He's all burned, and he has razors on his right hand." There was complete silence in the room now as Nancy took a deep breath.

"His name is Fred Krueger," she said. "He's tough, but we can beat him if we work together. I know because I've been there."

"What happened?" asked Kincaid.

Nancy shrugged. "I thought I killed him. Apparently I was wrong. And now he's stronger than ever. He tried to kill all of you as he killed the other so-called suicides, but you people are different. You have special powers in the dream world that you use to survive. You talked about your gifts a little when Neil hypnotized Kirsten."

"Help us fight him," said Taryn. The others nodded.

"I'll try. But you have to be willing to dream again. Otherwise you'll really go crazy, and he'll have won by default. We're all going to have to face him again, but this time we won't be alone."

"Lead us into battle," said Laredo, speaking for the group.

"Kirsten can take us to him," said Nancy. Kirsten looked at her and slowly nodded. Without a word, the others linked hands. Kirsten closed her eyes, and someone began to chant.

"One, two, Freddy's coming for you ..."

"Three, four ..." sang someone else.

And then they were all chanting together, no longer surprised that the others knew the song that each vaguely recalled from his or her own worst nightmare.

"Nine, ten, never sleep again."

All eyes opened and looked around.

Nothing seemed changed.

“Thanks a lot,” said Kincaid sarcastically.

“We’re here,” said a deep and resonant voice none of them had ever heard before. They turned to see Joey standing straight and tall, a smile of profound joy on his face. “In the dream, I am strong,” he said, suddenly doing a cartwheel across the floor. Laughing, he strode over to Kincaid and lifted the larger boy into the air with one hand.

“In the dream, I am fire,” said Taryn. She turned away from the others, opened her mouth, and spewed out a great flame. Jennifer laughed and extended her hand in congratulations. When Taryn tried to shake it, her hand passed right through.

“In the dream, I can fade away!” said Jennifer.

It was Laredo’s turn next to demonstrate his gift. He picked up a chair and pressed it to his chest. The chair turned into an accordion, and Laredo began to play a merry tune for the others as he danced for joy.

Immediately, Kincaid rose into the air and floated over to Kirsten.

“You brought us here?” he asked, delighted with his gift of flight.

“It’s my gift,” said Kirsten, “to move in and out of the dream world and to take others with me.”

“You’re all special in the dream,” said Nancy. “Together, you have the powers we need to beat Freddy once and for all.”

“We’re invincible,” boasted Jennifer.

“We are the Warriors of the Dream,” said Laredo, his accordion suddenly changing into a sword.

“It isn’t going to be easy,” warned Nancy. “I thought I killed the bastard years ago, but I was wrong. He’s back, and it’s going to take every ounce of courage we can muster to defeat him.”

“We’re ready,” said Kincaid, his feet just a few inches off the floor.

“Let the games begin,” said Laredo.

And then the door crashed open, and a few dead leaves blew into the room. Nancy and the others stepped outside to see a trail of slime leading around the corner of the corridor.

And there, at the end of the trail, stood Freddy Krueger, a crooked grin on his leathery face.

“Well, well! If it isn’t the Brady Bunch!”

Freddy raised his claw up in the air and swung it down at Jennifer. He seemed startled when the girl faded away and his hand passed right through her, throwing him off balance and sending him crashing into the wall behind her. He quickly staggered to his feet and rushed to Laredo. Again his razored glove swooped down for the kill, but Laredo just reached out his arm to block the blow. Suddenly the boy’s arm was transformed into an anvil, and Freddy’s blades sparked

harmlessly as they crashed against the heavy steel. Without hesitation, Kincaid propelled himself into the air and locked his powerful legs around Freddy's thick neck. It was Joey who knocked the wind out of the creature with a hard punch to the stomach. Kincaid withdrew as Freddy staggered from the force of the blow, bewildered by the sudden strength of his opposition.

Then Freddy saw Taryn standing quietly to one side, and a look of wicked joy returned to his eyes.

"Your turn to die, little girl," he said, stepping toward her. Taryn smiled, opened her mouth, and set the startled creature on fire.

The others began to applaud as Freddy wheeled around and around, trying in vain to escape the flames that engulfed him. He began shrieking in pain, his anguished cries suddenly turning into the piercing sound of a fire alarm.

And then they were in the Group Therapy Room again just as Neil and Dr. Maddalena rushed back inside.

"Who set off that alarm?" asked Dr. Maddalena, glaring suspiciously at Kincaid and the others.

"Don't look at them," said Nancy, suppressing a smile. "I've been with them the whole time."

Dr. Maddalena stared at her angrily and then left the room without saying a word. Neil looked at Nancy, shook his head slowly from side to side, and started to follow.

"See you later, Doc," said Joey.

Neil's jaw dropped open as Joey and the others strode boldly out of the room.

"What the hell's going on?" asked Neil.

"What do you mean?" asked Nancy with feigned innocence.

"The kids," said Neil. "They seem … different."

Nancy smiled.

"Healthier?" she suggested.

"I don't know. Maybe. All right, they seem healthier."

Nancy paused just a moment for effect. "I took them on a field trip," she said. "Kids love field trips."

Then she walked out, leaving Neil to stare after her in complete bewilderment.

Jennifer was having trouble sleeping since Kirsten went home.

The two girls had known each other only a few days, but a bond had been formed in that short time that was unlike any relationship Jennifer had known before. Kirsten was the only one who really

seemed to understand the hell that Jennifer was going through since the dreams began. Talking to Kirsten, Jennifer sometimes felt as if maybe everything was going to work out all right in the end after all.

If only she had met Kirsten a few days earlier, Jennifer thought, maybe she never would have doused her clothes with lighter fluid and threatened to set herself on fire.

“Got a light, Max?” she asked, encountering the burly orderly as she prowled the corridor.

“Sorry.” Max smiled and shrugged his broad shoulders. Jennifer’s request for a light had become sort of a running gag between the two of them. Sometimes he was tempted to offer her a match just to see what would happen. Max sensed a kind of inner strength in the girl that made him doubt that she would ever really take her own life. “Anything else I can do for you?”

Jennifer shook her head and sighed.

“Can’t sleep,” she said. Max wished he had a nickel for every time he had heard that complaint over the past few months.

“Why don’t you go log a little tube time?” he suggested, nodding in the direction of the TV lounge.

“It’s after hours,” said Jennifer.

Max smiled and gave the girl a conspiratorial wink.

“I won’t tell anybody,” he said.

“Thanks, Max,” she said. Jennifer had always enjoyed falling asleep in front of the TV at home, and it was one of the things she missed since being admitted to the hospital.

She took a few steps toward the TV lounge and suddenly stopped.

“Something wrong?” asked Max.

“No,” said Jennifer. After their encounter with Freddy, Nancy had warned the kids to stay together for their own safety. For a moment, Jennifer considered going back to the room and getting Taryn …

But no, that would be silly. Her roommate was probably fast asleep by now.

Besides, what possible harm could there be in watching a little late-night television?

Jennifer walked down the hall to the lounge, tuned in an old movie, and settled herself comfortably in front of the set. Almost immediately, she felt herself become deliciously drowsy. She closed her eyes for just a second and leaned back in the overstuffed armchair.

She opened her eyes a moment later to find that the picture had disappeared.

“Damn,” she said, getting up from her comfortable chair to adjust

the set. Patients weren't supposed to touch the controls, but Jennifer didn't want to disturb Max after he had been nice enough to let her watch past curfew. She fiddled with the fine-tuning and impatiently spun the channel control knob, but the screen remained blank.

"Damn," said Jennifer again, smacking the side of the TV with her tightly clenched fist. Just when she was starting to feel all cozy and sleepy, the damned set was on the blink. Jennifer tried to pound the side of the television again, but this time a hand came out of the side of the TV and clenched her fist in its iron grasp.

Jennifer tried to pull away, but it was no use. She was about to scream when a second hand reached out from the screen, its razor-tipped glove raised high in triumph.

"Oh my God," whispered Jennifer as the leering face of Freddy Krueger filled the screen in horrible close-up.

"Heeeere's Freddy!" he announced, laughing maniacally as his two extended arms tightened their grip on the terrified girl.

"Help me!" she screamed, but she knew even as she opened her mouth that no one could hear her.

"We've got a wonderful show for you tonight," said the face on the screen, a thick stream of drool oozing down its chin. "It's a delightful little program we like to call 'You Asked for It.' "

With that, Freddy's powerful arms jerked Jennifer forward, ramming her head through the TV screen with tremendous force, crushing her skull as the thick glass shattered and the picture tube imploded in a sparking, hissing mess of brain, glass, and glowing phosphors.

Max found Jennifer's body a few seconds later, her bloody legs dangling limply from the front of the set. He managed to call downstairs for help before rushing to the bathroom to puke up his guts.

Chapter 6

"Awful quiet around here," said Nancy, standing beside Max at the nurse's station.

"The kids are pissed off about not going to the funeral," said Max.

"You can't blame them." Nancy had argued with Dr. Maddalena for a long time about that one, but the woman just wouldn't listen to reason. *Rules are rules,* she had said. Nancy wanted to tell her what she could do with her fucking rules but had managed to restrain herself.

"By the way," said Max, "I think I found out something about that house Kirsten built."

"Did you?" Nancy had mentioned to Max that she would be interested in anything he could find out about Hathaway House, but she hadn't really expected him to come up with anything.

"I found this old picture in storage," he said, handing her a large framed photograph.

Nancy stared in amazement at the old photograph. It was a picture of the house on Elm Street as it might have looked half a century ago. A dozen or so nurses in starched uniforms were stiffly posed in front of the freshly painted structure.

"Seems Hathaway House used to be some sort of sanitarium back in the late thirties. Sort of a halfway house or something for mental cases. Moved to Westin Hills during the war."

Nancy studied the photograph for a minute and then looked up at Max. "Is there anyone I can talk to who might know more about Hathaway House?"

Max nodded, and pointed at one of the nurses in the photograph.

"This lady here might be able to help you. Name's Miss Sapphire. Just retired a few years ago. Lives in that old-age home just outside of town."

"Thanks, Max," said Nancy, giving the surprised orderly a grateful peck on the cheek. Then she grabbed her jacket and took off for the old-age home.

"Hathaway House?" said Miss Sapphire. She took a sip of tea and leaned back in her chair. "The first of its kind, in a way. Sort of an experiment in the treatment of mental illness. Only took women—women with really bad problems."

“Psychotics?” asked Nancy.

Miss Sapphire nodded. “Only, we didn’t have any fancy names for it then. ‘Possessed women,’ we used to say.”

“How long did the place exist?”

“Oh, only a few years. A neighborhood started growing up around it, and people didn’t much like having a houseful of weird women so close by. That’s why the folks that ran the place moved it out of town.”

“To Westin Hills,” said Nancy with a shudder.

“To Westin Hills,” said Miss Sapphire.

There was a long silence before Nancy asked her next question.

“Did anything terrible ever happen at Hathaway House?”

Miss Sapphire took another sip of tea and sighed.

“Many things, child,” she said. “Many things.” The old woman opened the scrapbook that lay on the table beside the teapot and pointed to a picture of a pretty young woman. “This one burned to death,” she said. “Still in her teens when she came to us, eight months pregnant. Transferred from the old county hospital. The Snakepit, they used to call it.”

“Still do,” said Nancy. Miss Sapphire nodded and continued her story.

“The way I heard it, the girl had been sold by the orderlies for five hundred dollars for the worst crazies to have their way with while the staff turned their backs. Doctors said she must have been raped a thousand times before she got to Hathaway.”

“How did she die?” asked Nancy in a whisper.

“Died giving birth,” said Miss Sapphire. “The baby was huge. Tore her right up. She was all alone and screaming for help when she knocked over an old gas lamp. Burned to death in her bed.”

“And the baby?”

“Burned pretty bad, but it lived.” She paused and shook her head thoughtfully. “Don’t know what ever became of that boy.”

Nancy leaned across the table and looked at the woman’s picture.

“Pretty,” she said.

“Pretty name, too,” said Miss Sapphire. “Amanda, it was. Amanda Krueger.”

Nancy lay in bed with her clothes on and tried to relax.

“This is dumb,” said Kirsten, sitting on the chair at the side of the bed.

“Sorry,” said Nancy, “but it’s the best I could come up with.”

“I don’t mean the idea,” said Kirsten. “I mean going alone. I should go with you. We’d have twice as much power together. You said so yourself.”

“Too dangerous,” said Nancy. “Besides, I need someone I can count on to stay awake.” She thought of Glen once more and felt a sharp pain in her heart. “Just wake me when it looks like I have the glove.”

“You’ve done this before, haven’t you?” asked Kirsten.

“Quiet, please,” said Nancy, ignoring the girl’s question. She closed her eyes and started counting backward very, very slowly.

“Ten … nine eight … seven …”

And then she was on Elm Street.

Nancy took a few tentative steps down the dark, tree-lined street. The house looked very far away, and Nancy found herself moving very slowly through the thick, still air. She became aware of a loud throbbing sound and realized it was her own heart.

Suddenly, the idea of dropping in on Freddy unannounced and stealing his claw didn’t seem quite so brilliant.

Nancy picked up a heavy tree branch and moved closer to the house. She finally reached the porch and was about to go inside when something crashed to the ground beside her.

“Kirsten!” cried Nancy, feeling a weird combination of anger and relief.

“I thought you might need some help,” said the girl, not realizing how close Nancy had come to bashing her head in with the heavy branch.

“I will need help,” said Nancy. “I just don’t know if you can give it to me from here.”

“I don’t know either, but I couldn’t just sit there and wait.” Kirsten looked around and took a deep breath. “Any sign of the bastard yet?”

Nancy was about to reply when she heard the low, menacing growl of a very large dog. Both girls turned to face the beast, but the huge creature they saw was not like any dog either of them had seen before.

The massive German shepherd with the red-and-green-striped fur had the leering, burned face of Freddy Krueger!

Nancy and Kirsten dashed into the house as the great beast lunged forward, a long string of thick saliva hanging from its half-human, half-canine jaws. The girls ran down a long, unfamiliar hallway while the creature crashed through the closed door, the sound of its raspy breathing seeming to fill the entire house.

“The cellar,” whispered Nancy, taking the younger girl by the hand and leading her down a seemingly endless stairway. There was a kind

of hazy fog in the air, and Nancy proceeded cautiously through a large iron door to the old furnace. “This is where my mother hid the claw,” she said, pulling open the door to the firebox.

“Help me,” said Jennifer, her head lodged awkwardly inside the firebox as maggots slowly but steadily devoured her bloody face.

Nancy screamed and whirled around, only to see Freddy, no longer in canine disguise, lashing out at Kirsten with the razor-tipped glove he wore on his right hand. The blades cut deep, and a thin stream of blood began to flow from the girl’s wounded arm. Nancy grabbed her by the other arm and pulled her away, dragging her up the stairs and into another winding hallway that seemed to lead nowhere.

“Somebody please help us,” gasped Kirsten, her left arm throbbing painfully. She thought of the strongest person she knew and called his name out loud.

Suddenly, Kincaid disappeared from his hospital bed and crashed into the corridor a few feet behind Freddy.

Immediately, Freddy wheeled around and raised his claw, surprised but delighted by the unexpected arrival of a new victim. What he hadn’t counted on, however, were Kincaid’s keen survival instincts, honed to a fine edge by years of street fighting. It only took the huge teenager a fraction of a second to recognize the threat present in Freddy’s gleaming blades, and that second was all the time he needed to plant his massive fist squarely between his assailant’s eyes.

“Joey?” said Kirsten, closing her eyes and picturing the boy in her mind, strong and graceful as he was in the world of dreams. “Laredo? Taryn?”

And one by one, the dream warriors slipped out of their everyday reality and answered Kirsten’s summons to the world of dreams.

It was Joey who landed the next punch, his fist landing on Freddy’s jaw with tremendous force as Kincaid floated away from the creature’s downswept claw.

“Way to go!” said Laredo, quickly accepting the bizarre fact that he was now inside someone else’s dream. Without a moment’s hesitation, Laredo joined his hands together as if in prayer. His hands seemed to fuse together and grow, turning first into a pair of large cymbals and then into a whirring buzz saw. “Cover me!” he called to Taryn, swiftly advancing on the cowering Freddy. The girl opened her mouth and spewed forth a great orange flame.

But now Freddy was on his feet, and he loomed above the brave teenagers, three times his normal size with claws like enormous razor-edged swords. Laredo stopped in his tracks and looked to the others for help.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Nancy, knowing as does any good leader

when it's time to sound retreat. She grabbed Kirsten's good arm, and the others all joined hands.

"What about the claw?" asked Kirsten.

"Forget the claw!" insisted Nancy. "Just get us out of here!"

"I'll get it!" said Joey, releasing Taryn's hand to leap high into the air and kick the advancing giant hard in the chest. Freddy toppled to the ground, suddenly reverting to his normal size. Joey jumped on top of him and yanked the bladed glove off his right hand. "Get out of here!" he shouted, tossing the terrible claw to Nancy as Freddy began struggling to his feet.

Kirsten looked at the claw in Nancy's hand for a split second and then closed her eyes. Suddenly, she was back at the hospital. A moment later, Nancy, Kincaid, Laredo, and Taryn crashed to the floor beside her.

Max raced into the room and immediately saw the blood on Kirsten's arm. He was about to call for help when Dr. Maddalena appeared.

"What in bloody hell is going on around here?" she demanded, surveying the scene from the doorway. "And what are you doing here?" she asked Kirsten, apparently more disturbed by the girl's unauthorized presence in the hospital than by the bloody wound in her arm. Before Kirsten could speak, Dr. Maddalena turned her accusing eyes on Kincaid. "I swear to you, Kincaid, if you're responsible for all this—"

"It was the man in the nightmare!" said Kincaid. The others nodded their heads.

Dr. Maddalena looked from face to face and decided that further questioning at this time would be pointless. Besides, it had finally dawned on her that Kirsten was in desperate need of medical attention.

"Get her to the E.R.," she told Max, "and then call her parents and re-admit her. The rest of you, get to bed immediately. And as for you," she said turning to Nancy, "who the hell do you think you are to be playing dangerous games with my patients?" Dr. Maddalena saw the bladed glove in Nancy's hand and yanked it away from her. "Maybe you'd like to explain this monstrosity to the police."

Nancy opened her mouth to explain but found she was too weary to speak.

"I want you out of here, Thompson," said the Dragon Lady, her eyes glowing with hatred. "And if you ever dare set foot in here again, I'll personally see to it that you're committed to this institution for the rest of your pathetic little life."

She turned and stalked out, leaving Nancy all alone to reflect on all that had happened.

"Oh my God," said Nancy aloud. "Joey's still back there."

"Come on out, Krueger!" shouted Joey, never feeling so alone or helpless in his entire life.

This isn't even my dream, he thought, waiting for Kirsten to bring him back to whatever safe haven the others had retreated to.

"Come on!" he shouted again with forced bravado. "I'm *your* worst nightmare now, you ugly son of a bitch!"

Slowly he walked down a long, dark hallway, prepared for Freddy to jump out at him at any moment. He saw an open door at the end of the hall and took a deep breath.

"Let's get this over with," he said aloud as he stepped into the room.

To Joey's delight, however, the figure reclining on the frilly pink bedspread bore no resemblance whatsoever to Freddy Krueger.

"Hi, Joey," said the girl in the skimpy black negligee. "Remember me?"

"Beth Dorsett," whispered Joey, too stunned to contemplate the improbability of it all. Beth had been the subject of Joey's most intense private fantasies ever since junior high school. The fact that she and her fancy friends always made fun of him hadn't deterred him from imagining almost daily what it would be like to hold the exquisite girl in his arms.

"You've changed, Joey," said the girl, rising from the bed and moving toward him. "You're so handsome now. So sexy." Joey swallowed hard and tried not to stare at her lush cleavage. "Don't you like me anymore?" she pouted, the back of her hand softly caressing his reddening cheek. "Don't you want me, Joey? I know I want you."

The bedroom door closed while Joey and Beth embraced, their kisses growing increasingly passionate as the girl plunged her tongue into the boy's open mouth. It took Joey a few seconds to realize that her thick tongue was growing rapidly, snaking deeper and deeper down his throat until he began to gag. He tried to let go, but she held him in an iron grip. Joey began screaming in agony as the serpentine tongue worked its way into his skull, popping out his right eye before doubling back to push his other eye deep into his hemorrhaging brain.

"You're such a good kisser," Freddy croaked, resuming his own horrible form. Joey toppled over, clutching at his empty eye sockets as he fell onto the dirty red-and-green-striped bedspread. The four posts of the old bed suddenly came to life, four powerful arms grabbing each of Joey's limbs and pulling him taut as a rubber band,

suspending him in midair above the stained mattress, his body stretched beyond the breaking point until it snapped in a sickening spray of blood and shattered bone.

Back at Westin Hills, Kirsten Parker had begun to weep uncontrollably.

Chapter 7

"Where are you going?" asked Neil. He had to walk very fast to keep up with Nancy as she strode briskly across the hospital grounds.

"I don't know," she replied honestly. "I just know I can't stay here anymore."

"Because of Dr. Maddalena? I'll straighten that out for you. If I quit every time the Dragon Lady—"

"It's not just her," interrupted Nancy. "There's something going on here that I just can't handle anymore. I thought I could help these kids, but now I'm not so sure I can even help myself."

"I think you've already started to help them," said Neil. "And I have a funny feeling maybe they've started helping you, too."

Nancy stopped and looked at Neil. She swallowed hard. Maybe he was right. Maybe …

Then she remembered Kirsten's bloody arm and everything that had happened since she started working at Westin Hills. No, she was hurting these kids by staying here, and they had already endured more hurt than anyone deserved to endure in a lifetime.

"Give a girl a ride?" said Nancy.

"Where to?"

"The bus station."

Neil looked at her for a long moment and then shrugged his shoulders. She followed him to his car, climbed into the front seat, and fell asleep.

She opened her eyes in time to see Neil pulling up into the driveway of his own house.

"I don't see any Greyhounds," said Nancy.

"I keep 'em in the bedroom," he replied.

Nancy looked at Neil. Then she looked at the house for a moment and smiled.

"Show me," she said.

They lay still in each other's arms for a long time before Nancy broke the silence. "Have you ever thought of suicide?" she asked.

Neil sighed and shook his head. "Am I that lousy in bed?" he asked.

Nancy smiled and kissed him tenderly on the lips. "As a matter of

fact, you're incredible in bed. I guess my timing was just a little off."

"Your timing was perfect," said Neil with a big smile.

"You know what I mean." Nancy gave him a playful slap on the arm.

"Do *you* think about suicide a lot?" asked Neil, suddenly turning serious.

Nancy shrugged.

"It's a way out, isn't it?"

"For cowards maybe."

"I don't think it's all that easy. If it were, a lot more people would do it." Nancy paused and gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling. "The only reason I haven't killed myself already is that I have no guarantee he would leave me alone, even if I were dead."

"Who?" asked Neil, taking her face in his hands and turning it toward his.

"The man I told you about," said Nancy.

"Krueger? That's—"

"Crazy?" said Nancy. "You think I'm crazy, don't you?"

"Of course not," said Neil, but his answer came just a second too late.

"Let's go to sleep." Nancy turned her back to Neil and almost immediately fell into a deep sleep.

Nancy awoke moments later to the sound of a dripping faucet. She slipped out of bed and followed the sound to the bathroom.

The faucet was dripping blood, and the basin was already filled with the scarlet liquid.

Nancy closed the faucet and became aware of a louder dripping behind her. She turned and saw that the bathtub too was filled with blood that continued to spurt in thick globs from the faucet. She stepped forward to shut the leak and saw the faces in the shower curtain.

"Help us," they moaned. Nancy stared in horror at the faces of Philip and Jennifer, their dead eyes staring at her from somewhere beyond the thick white vinyl, their bloody faces pressed tight against the heavy fabric.

"Kill him, Nancy," they chanted in unison. "Kill him before he kills us all!"

"We've got his claws," said Nancy, desperate to believe that her terrible work was finally done.

"Use them," said the voices. "Kill him by his own hand."

She was about to speak when the curtain began to move, the curtain

hooks making a horrible screeching sound as they scraped against the metal rod. It wasn't until she saw the bloody, clawed hand emerge from behind the curtain that Nancy began to scream.

"What's wrong?" asked Neil, shaking her roughly by the shoulders as she sat up beside him in bed. Nancy's eyes snapped open. She stared in horror at the closed bathroom door, her heart pounding violently in her chest.

"I have to go to the hospital right away," said Nancy, certain now that she would never leave this place until the job she had begun on Elm Street was finally completed.

"I can't believe what you're telling me," said Neil, following Nancy down the corridor to Dr. Maddalena's office. "You're not talking about dreaming as any sane person knows it."

"I'm talking about the dream as reality," said Nancy. "Dreams that you can touch, taste, feel, and even be killed in!"

"That sounds like bullshit to me," said Neil.

"Tell it to Philip and Jennifer," said Nancy.

"But they're …" Neil stopped in mid-sentence.

"Now open the door."

Neil looked at the door to Dr. Maddalena's office and shook his head. "This is crazy," he said. "Do you know she's already thinking of filing criminal charges against you?"

"She stole something from me, and I want it back. Now open the door."

Neil hesitated for a moment and then unlocked the door with his master key. He stood guard outside while Nancy rifled the desk drawers.

"They've got to be here," she muttered, carelessly tossing aside books and papers as she searched for the deadly claw.

Then she noticed the wall safe, its door slightly ajar. She crossed the room and threw open the door.

Joey's head stared back at her, his eyes wide and glassy.

"He got them back," said Joey as Nancy began to scream.

Neil rushed to the safe and saw only a slight smear of blood. He turned around and saw Nancy racing down the hall toward the Group Therapy Room.

Nancy peeked into the room and saw that Dr. Maddalena was leading the session herself. It was clear from the expression on her face that she was getting nowhere fast.

"Kincaid," said Dr. Maddalena, singling out the boy whom she

perceived as being the closest thing this motley group of disturbed adolescents had to a leader. “Why don’t you tell us what’s been happening these past few days?”

“Why don’t you eat shit and die?” suggested Kincaid.

Dr. Maddalena stared at him for a long moment and decided to try a different approach. Perhaps, she thought, one of the less aggressive children would be more inclined to cooperate.

“Taryn?” The girl just shrugged and shook her head slowly from side to side.

“Laredo?”

Silence.

“Anyone?” said Dr. Maddalena in a tone of voice that clearly betrayed her mounting irritation. “Well,” she said, rising to her feet after a few painfully long seconds, “if you’ll excuse me, I believe I can find more constructive uses for my time.” Nancy ducked into an open doorway as Dr. Maddalena stormed down the hall.

Every face in the room lit up when Nancy walked in a moment later.

“Welcome back,” said Kincaid, a big grin on his face.

“I knew you wouldn’t leave us,” said Kirsten, jumping from her seat to embrace her friend. The others followed Kirsten’s lead, and soon they were all crowding around Nancy, their faces glowing with renewed hope. She waited until they calmed down and then stepped back to speak.

“It’s time for the final battle,” said Nancy, sounding very much like a general addressing the troops.

“Just tell us what to do,” said Kincaid. Nancy smiled at the boy and nodded. For once, Dr. Maddalena’s instincts had been right: If Kincaid cooperated, the others would follow. Ultimately, however, Nancy’s secret weapon was Kirsten Parker. Nancy herself was the seasoned veteran in this campaign, but Kirsten alone held the power needed to stop the enemy dead in his tracks.

“Come with me,” said Nancy, holding out her hands as she lay down in the center of the floor. One by one, the others joined her, their heads in the center and their arms linked to form a star.

At that moment, Neil Guiness appeared in the doorway.

“Neil?” said Nancy, extending a hand in invitation.

“I …” Neil stopped, not knowing what to say or do. He looked out into the hall, imagining what Dr. Maddalena would say if she walked in and found him lying on the floor with Nancy and the kids. Then he looked at Nancy—so sure of herself, so confident that what she was doing wasn’t so crazy as if appeared to be.

I love this crazy lady, he thought, suddenly tempted to follow her lead despite all his professional instincts to the contrary. Maybe Nancy was crazy as a loon, but she seemed to share some fundamental understanding with these kids that had continued to elude him despite his persistent effort to get through to them. If Nancy had some way, however unorthodox, of helping them work out whatever it was that was troubling them, Neil very much wanted to be a part of it.

But now, as he gazed into Nancy's eyes, he saw an intensity of purpose and vision that was truly terrifying. Wherever she was headed with these kids, Neil was not yet ready to go.

Slowly, he shook his head no.

Nancy nodded once and took a deep breath. "Kirsten," she said, forcing herself to dismiss Neil Guiness from her thoughts.

Kirsten nodded and closed her eyes. Ten seconds later, she was fast asleep.

Neil watched and allowed himself a slight smile. *So that's what this is all about,* he thought. He had seen plenty of group meditations in his time and hadn't been impressed.

What he had never seen before was five people disappear before his astonished eyes.

It was, he had to admit, damned impressive.

And then they were on Elm Street, standing before the house they had all seen before in their worst nightmares.

"This is it," said Nancy, feeling an exhilarating sense of power. "This is where he was born, and this is where he has to die."

"What's the plan?" asked Kirsten.

"We move in fast," said Nancy. "We find the son of a bitch, and we take his weapon."

"And then?" asked Taryn.

"Then we kill the motherfucker with his own fucking claws," said Kincaid.

"Let's go," said Nancy, stepping up onto the porch. "And don't forget—stay together!"

Taryn was the last to enter the house. I wasn't that she was any more afraid than the others—indeed, Taryn was as eager as any of them to get the great battle under way—it was just her way to fall back and let others lead. All her life, she had thought of herself as a follower. Her loyalty and courage were beyond reproach. Given a good cause, Taryn always believed she would follow a strong leader into the gates of hell

itself.

And now she had.

Taryn was about to follow the others up the narrow staircase when she heard a familiar voice.

"Sugar baby?"

She stopped and turned around.

"Grandma?" Unnoticed by the others, Taryn strayed from the group and entered a small room that she had somehow overlooked before. A picture in an old-fashioned frame hung on the wall. Taryn crossed the room and smiled. She had always loved that old photograph of herself as a baby cradled in the strong arms of her loving grandmother.

But what in the world was that picture doing …?

"Sugar baby?"

Taryn whirled around to see her grandmother sitting in the big rocker she always sat in when she was alive.

"Grandma!" said Taryn, instinctively rushing into the old woman's loving arms.

"I'm so glad you've come back," said the old woman, one strong arm around Taryn's waist while the other caressed her soft hair. "We were all so worried when you ran away."

"I didn't run away, Grandma. I had these dreams, and then … I had to go to the hospital."

"I missed you so much," said the woman in the rocking chair as she tightened her grip on the girl's narrow waist.

"Don't worry, Grandma," said Taryn, feeling at peace for the first time in many months. "I'm never going to leave you again."

"You can bet your sweet ass on that," croaked Freddy Krueger, rocking contentedly as his gleaming blades sliced smoothly across the girl's screaming face.

Chapter 8

In another reality, Neil Guiness lay in bed with his clothes on and turned off the light.

"This is crazy," he said aloud as he took a series of slow deep breaths and tried to will himself to sleep.

Neil pictured the old house on Elm Street in his mind, forcing the image of the abandoned house to stay uppermost in his consciousness even as he began to think about what he had seen at the hospital that day.

People don't just disappear. That's what Dr. Maddalena said, and for once, of course, she was right.

Still, he had been there. He had seen … what?

Maybe it had been a dream. Maybe this whole crazy thing was a dream. Maybe there was no Nancy Thompson, except in his fevered imagination. And maybe there was no Dr. Maddalena and no Westin Hills Psychiatric Hospital either.

For that matter, maybe there was no Neil Guiness.

Neil took another deep breath and forced his mind's eye to return to the old house on Elm Street.

A line from Shakespeare drifted through his consciousness as he surrendered to the sweet drowsiness that was finally overtaking him.

For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come …

And then he was there.

Neil stepped up onto the porch and knocked on the door.

"Nancy?"

He opened the door and was instantly enshrouded in a thick, bluish fog.

"Nancy?" he repeated. Cautiously, Neil stepped into the room. There was a mirror on the wall. Neil looked at his reflection and then took hold of his right cheek. Slowly, he stretched it like taffy at arm's length, a grin of sheer delight on his distorted face.

"I'm in," he whispered in awe as his face resumed its normal shape. "I'm in the dreamworld!"

Suddenly, he heard a crashing noise from somewhere farther back in the house. He walked through the door at the end of the room and found himself submerged in total darkness.

In another part of the house, Nancy searched for her missing comrades. “Taryn?” she called. “Kincaid? Laredo?”

And then she saw him.

“Miss your little friends?” he rasped, a crooked smile on his ugly face.

“You son of a bitch!” she screamed, somehow knowing in that instant that Taryn was dead.

Freddy laughed, raised his bladed glove, and took one menacing step forward. Nancy ducked as he swung out at her and ran from the room as fast as she could with Freddy always just a few steps behind. She ran through doorway after doorway down a seemingly endless maze of dimly lit corridors before suddenly crashing into someone in the darkness.

“Neil! What are you doing here?” she asked, more annoyed than relieved by his presence. Maybe she loved him, but this wasn’t the world in which their love belonged. Nancy knew there were dangers here that Neil had literally never dreamed of before.

“I had to come,” he said, his voice trembling with excitement. “Don’t you understand what this means? I’ve been studying the dream state from the outside for years, and now I’m actually on the inside looking in! This is going to make one hell of a paper!”

“You have to get out,” said Nancy, shaking her head frantically from side to side. “You’re in serious danger here.”

“This is fantastic,” said Neil, his entire body seeming to vibrate in tune to some unseen force. “It’s kind of like … it’s kind of like being inside some kind of incredible television!”

“Stay tuned,” said Nancy, “because you’re about to see something you’ve never seen on TV.”

And then Freddy appeared, twice as large as life with his gleaming blades raised high for the kill.

“Is there a doctor in the house?” he asked. Nancy grabbed Neil’s hand and pulled him out of the room.

“Let’s get out of here!” gasped Neil as they raced down a crooked corridor that seemed to get narrower and narrower the faster they ran.

“Your dream or mine?” asked Nancy, looking back to see Freddy gaining on them fast. She pulled Neil through the first open door she saw and almost tripped over the dismembered remains of Taryn and Joey.

Nancy watched in grim silence as Neil turned away and vomited violently in the corner of the room.

Laredo had lost the others around the corner of one of the countless meandering hallways they had been wandering since setting foot in the house.

No matter.

More than any of the others, Laredo felt at home in the world of dreams. Here at last was the ultimate manifestation of Dungeons and Dragons, with no dice or computer program standing between the player and his wily opponent. This time, the sword in Laredo's hand was a real one, forged from his own vivid imaginings. Laredo had never handled a real sword before, but he knew as soon as he grasped the heavy hilt that this was the weapon he was born to wield.

Cautiously, Laredo proceeded down a slippery staircase, ever aware that the devil can assume many forms. If his years of game-playing had taught him anything, it was that underestimating your opponent's strength was the quickest route to defeat.

"Rado?"

Laredo whirled around, his eyes bright and his sword held high.

"It's me, Rado. It's your brother Toby."

The boy in the green-and-red-striped bathing suit couldn't have been more than seven years old.

"You're not Toby," said Laredo, the sword shaking visibly in his hand. "Toby's dead."

"You were supposed to keep an eye on me in the pool," said the boy. "If you hadn't answered the phone, I'd still be alive."

"I was only gone for a second," said Laredo, his voice trembling almost imperceptibly.

"A second was all I needed to drown."

"I'm sorry," whispered Laredo. How often had he wished he had never gone off to answer the telephone that terrible day! It was after Toby died that he had begun to immerse himself in the world of fantasy. And then the dreams began …

"Hold me, Rado," said the boy, extending his thin arms. "Hold me, and everything will be all right."

Laredo paused, took a deep breath, and stepped forward. Suddenly, his foot lashed out, landing squarely in the boy's crotch. Roaring with pain, Freddy Krueger lurched back and crashed into the wall behind him.

"You didn't think I'd fall for the old shape-changing trick, did you?" asked Laredo, a triumphant smile on his face. "We dream warriors are too clever for that." Laredo paused as the implications of being a dream warrior slowly dawned on him. "All right," he said, mustering his concentration, "let's try playing by your rules for a while."

And then, before Freddy's eyes, the boy tossed aside his sword and metamorphosed into a fierce dragon with powerful claws and gleaming yellow eyes. Immediately, Freddy turned himself into a large black crow, flapping quickly out of reach just as a tongue of flame shot out of the dragon's mouth, incinerating a nearby table. No sooner had the crow attacked the dragon's eyes with its sharp beak and claws than the serpent disappeared, only to be replaced by a huge red net that flung itself in the air and trapped the flapping bird. But then the bird was gone, and in its place was an oozing blob of protoplasm that quickly seeped through the close-knit mesh.

And then the blob disappeared, and Laredo resumed his normal form, poised for his opponent's next attack.

But nothing happened.

Freddy was gone.

"I've won," Laredo whispered, hardly able to believe his own success. He took a deep, calming breath and closed his eyes for just a second.

But a second was all it took for Laredo's sword to fly up from the floor and pierce him through the heart. Suddenly, the floor opened up beneath his feet and Laredo was sucked into a whirlpool of flames that instantly scorched his flesh to the bone, the floor itself laughing in triumph as the boy sank deeper and deeper into the all-consuming hellfire.

And then there were four.

No one spoke for a long time as Nancy and Neil and Kirsten and Kincaid faced each other in the living room of the old house on Elm Street.

"Some dream warriors we turned out to be," said Kincaid at last.

"We're alive, aren't we?" said Kirsten.

"And so is he," said Nancy.

"Whatever he is," muttered Neil, heading for the front door.

Suddenly, the door slammed shut and the lights went off. Somebody screamed, and then the room was illuminated by an eerie green light.

Freddy Krueger stood in the middle of the room, his talon-tipped hand extended in an obscene gesture of greeting.

"Welcome, my children," he croaked.

"Fuck you," said Kincaid, spitting squarely into Freddy's right eye. As Freddy stepped back and wiped the thick glob of saliva from his face, Kincaid kicked him hard in the stomach and sent the startled

creature crashing into the far wall.

“Let’s get out of here,” shouted Nancy, knowing that the four of them were not powerful enough to snatch the demon’s claws.

“Where do we go?” asked Kirsten.

“It’s up to you!” said Nancy. “You pulled us *into* your dream. Now you have to pull us *out!”*

“What do I do?” asked the girl as Freddy slowly staggered to his feet.

“Concentrate!” shouted Nancy. “Think of the place you know best and take us there. Now!”

Kirsten looked into Nancy’s eyes and nodded her head. She closed her eyes just as Freddy’s claw lashed wildly through the thin air.

There was a party going on at the Parker house.

Undeniably the social event of the year, according to the local society columnist. *Anyone who is anyone will be there.*

Mrs. Parker was pleased. Even Jack Webster, the elusive thespian who was rarely seen anywhere except onstage, had promised to put in a brief appearance. This was going to be the party that everyone at the country club would be talking about for a long time to come.

Mrs. Parker was about to have a sharp word with an idle waiter when the telephone rang.

“No, Dr. Maddalena,” said Mrs. Parker, more than a little annoyed that the woman had dared to call in the middle of her soirée, “I haven’t seen Kirsten … Yes, I understand there’s been some trouble over there … Quite frankly, Doctor, I would say that this is your problem and not mine. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have guests to attend to.”

She hung up the phone and returned to the living room. The waiter was now standing alone in the corner of the room, resting his tray on Mrs. Parker’s favorite Chippendale chair and fingering the gilt frame on her recently acquired Monet.

Or was it Manet? Mrs. Parker could never remember. In either case, it was extremely valuable, and the lazy clod was going to pay dearly for his impudence.

Mrs. Parker was about to speak severely to the young man when Kirsten, Nancy, Neil, and Kincaid appeared out of nowhere and crashed into the center of the crowded buffet table.

Nancy scrambled to her feet and checked out her companions. Everyone seemed to be all right except for a few minor scrapes and bruises. Kincaid had already snatched a handful of shrimp from a

broken dish on the floor and was studying the house and its well-dressed occupants with admiring eyes.

"Some party!" he said.

"Just what do you people think you're doing?" asked Mrs. Parker, turning around just in time to see Kirsten carefully stepping out of her mother's finest punch bowl. "You'll lose your license for this, young man," she said, pointing an accusing finger at Neil.

"Mother …" Kirsten began.

"I'll deal with you later, young lady," said Mrs. Parker. "Please go to your room immediately."

"Too late," said Nancy as the floor began to tremble.

And then the room itself seemed to explode as Freddy erupted violently from the center of the floor with a scream of rage.

Immediately, Mrs. Parker stepped forward to chastise her uninvited guest.

"Just who do you think …?"

Before she could finish her question, however, Freddy lashed out and slashed the woman across the stomach. As Mrs. Parker looked down in horror at her exposed bowels, Freddy plunged his head into the woman's midsection and began to devour her still-throbbing viscera.

"Next course!" croaked Freddy, blood and guts dripping from his chin.

Nancy grabbed Kirsten and literally dragged her out of the room, Neil and Kincaid following close behind.

"It's just a dream," Nancy assured the hysterical girl, although she knew perfectly well that they no longer dwelled in the world of dreams. What was done from here on in could not be undone. There would be time later for Kirsten to mourn her mother as Nancy had once mourned hers. For now, there were battles to be fought and powerful enemies to be vanquished. At least they had finally lured the demon onto their own turf.

Nancy was beginning to wonder if that hadn't been a terrible mistake.

As Nancy and her friends fled, Freddy followed close behind, slashing wildly at the frantic guests, leaving a trail of gore in his wake. Kirsten had taken the lead now, steering the others around the corner and into her father's trophy room.

"Holy shit!" said Kincaid, looking around in amazement as Kirsten locked the door behind them. One wall of the den was lined with mounted animal heads, souvenirs of Mr. Parker's many hunting trips to the African plains. On the opposite wall was a case containing more

guns than Kincaid had seen in all his years on the mean streets of the inner city.

“Give me the key,” demanded Kincaid.

“I don’t know where he keeps it,” said Kirsten.

“Damn!” Kincaid started rummaging wildly through the metal cabinet next to the window. Meanwhile, Nancy had walked over to the glass-encased gun rack and tried the door.

“It’s not locked,” she said, swinging open the door.

“Daddy must have been showing his collection to one of the guests,” said Kirsten.

Kincaid brushed past the girl, took a vintage submachine gun out of the case, and held it lovingly in his arms.

“Be careful,” said Neil. “That thing might be loaded.”

“It probably doesn’t even have a firing pin,” said Kincaid.

Just then, Freddy’s metal claw ripped through the wooden door. Kincaid wheeled around, aimed the weapon, and squeezed the trigger. The door exploded in a blizzard of wood chips as the volley of bullets sent Freddy flying back into the hallway.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Nancy, knowing perfectly well that it was going to take more than bullets to stop Freddy Krueger.

“Where are we going?” asked Kirsten.

“You’re the driver,” said Nancy. “Everybody link hands.”

Neil looked annoyed. “This is no time for—”

“Tell it to him!” said Nancy. Neil looked at the enraged creature crashing through the splintered wooden door and quickly joined the circle. “Get us out of here, Kirsten!”

“I’m scared,” said the girl.

“Concentrate!”

Kirsten closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

Then the door caved in, and a bloody Fred Krueger clawed madly at the air where a moment before had stood the four remaining dream warriors.

Chapter 9

It had been a very long week for Dr. Maddalena.

First Kirsten Parker tried to kill herself. Then that strange Thompson girl came around and started stirring up trouble; those nice children Philip and Jennifer had their dreadful accidents; and that awful Kincaid became even more abusive than usual. And just when things seemed about as bad as they could be, the entire lot of them disappears and Neil Guiness swears that he saw them vanish in front of his eyes.

And now Dr. Guiness himself was missing.

Dr. Maddalena had worked long and hard to establish herself and her hospital in the community, and she wasn't about to see all her hard work go down the drain just because Neil Guiness had the hots for some little tramp like Nancy Thompson. Still, if Guiness and the kids didn't show up soon, she would have no choice but to call in the police. As much as she wanted to avoid a scandal, Dr. Maddalena almost hoped that Neil Guiness would turn out to be responsible for all this so she could have the distinct personal pleasure of sending his highly respected ass to jail.

And as she savored that thought, a square hole in space suddenly opened up in the middle of the room and Neil, Nancy, and Kirsten tumbled through.

"Where's Kincaid?" asked Nancy, ignoring the flustered Dr. Maddalena.

"Help me!"

They all turned to see Kincaid stuck exactly halfway through the square, one half of his body in the hospital and the other half back at Kirsten's house.

"He's coming!" the boy shouted. "Get me out of here! Please!"

"Come on!" yelled Nancy. Neil and Kirsten joined her in pulling on Kincaid's arm and leg. "You too!" ordered Nancy, turning to Dr. Maddalena. The older woman hesitated for just a moment and then joined the others.

"He's got my leg!" screamed Kincaid, twitching wildly. "Do something! Please!"

"Concentrate, Kirsten," gasped Nancy. "Pull him in!"

"I'm trying!" said Kirsten. "It's just not working!"

And then Kincaid began to scream, first like a person in great pain

and then like nothing human anyone had ever heard. Kirsten was crying now, and even Dr. Maddalena was feeling something vaguely akin to compassion. They watched helplessly as the blood began to spurt from somewhere behind the square, four razor-sharp blades poking through and slowly working their way up the screaming boy's body. Then the blades reached his throat and the screaming abruptly stopped. Everyone stepped back as one side of Kincaid's body, raggedly sheared down the center, slid down the square like a specimen squirming on a lab slide before crashing to the floor.

It was Dr. Maddalena who began to scream now as the head and torso of Freddy Krueger pushed through the strange hole in the fabric of reality. Freddy's mad laughter was the last sound she heard before the creature lashed out with his bloody claw and neatly sliced her head off.

"Are we dreaming or awake?" asked Neil, gasping for breath as he followed the fleeing Nancy and Kirsten out into the hospital corridor.

"There's no difference anymore!" shouted Nancy, desperately searching for an escape route.

Then, at the end of the hallway, she saw a door she had never noticed before. Without hesitation, she flung it open and began racing down the long flight of stairs that lay behind. The others followed, running as fast as they could, Freddy's claw scraping horribly along the metal railing a few steps behind.

After what seemed like hours of endless running, the breathless warriors arrived at a weathered wooden door. Nancy opened the door and pushed Neil and Kirsten inside. No sooner had she slammed it shut behind them than Freddy's claw ripped through from the other side.

"We're back on Elm Street," said Kirsten calmly, her capacity for surprise long ago used up.

Nancy looked around and saw that the upper level of the old house was a sea of flames. She turned back to the door just as Freddy burst through.

Suddenly Neil stepped forward, bravely positioning himself between Freddy and the girls.

The brilliant young Dr. Guiness had a plan.

"Get out of here!" he shouted to the surprised-looking creature. "This is my dream, you ugly son of a bitch. Nobody comes in here without my permission. Understand? Nobody!"

Freddy stopped and stared at Neil in amazement.

"You're crazier than I am," he said, lashing out with his left arm and flicking Neil aside like a pesty mosquito. Neil crashed into the

opposite wall and lay unconscious on the floor.

“And now, my darlings …” said Freddy, grinning wickedly at the girls as he beckoned to them with his glistening talons.

Nancy and Kirsten looked around and saw no way out.

“Coal chute,” whispered Nancy.

Kirsten gave her a puzzled look and then closed her eyes.

Nancy turned around and saw the open coal chute appear on the wall behind them. Without hesitating, she grabbed the younger girl’s hand and pulled her through.

The chute twisted and wound in the darkness as the two girls plummeted ever downward, landing at last on a pile of filthy rags.

Even before she opened her eyes, Nancy felt the steamy air and heard the relentless pounding of the machinery.

“We’re in his boiler room,” she said. “This is where all the killing began.”

And this is where it will all end, she added to herself.

Suddenly Freddy popped out from behind the surging furnace. “Welcome home, Nancy,” he rasped.

Grabbing a large pipe wrench, Kirsten unhestitantly stepped between Freddy and her friend. Freddy just laughed and knocked the heavy tool out of her hand with a swipe of his gloved fist. He took a step forward and licked his blackened lips as if better to savor his long-awaited triumph.

And then Nancy remembered a lesson she had learned long ago.

“We’re doing this all wrong,” she said, turning to Kirsten with a slight smile on her face. “You can’t fight the demon with fear and anger.”

“Shut up,” said Freddy, glaring furiously at Nancy.

“Krueger feeds on hatred,” she continued. “He always has. It’s the terror he creates in all of us that’s let him live as long as he has.”

“I’m warning you,” said the creature as Nancy turned her puzzled friend 180 degrees.

“What are you doing?” asked Kirsten.

“The only way to fight a monster like Freddy is to turn your back on him. Together, we can take away the evil energy he feeds on.”

Freddy backed off, a look of genuine fear on his twisted features as Nancy began to chant.

“Freddy is nothing. Freddy is nothing.”

Black smoke began to rise from Freddy’s charred flesh as Kirsten picked up the chant. He stood paralyzed in one spot as the girls began to adapt their short refrain to a simple childlike tune. Nancy began to

smile, almost relaxing as she started to wonder what all the fuss had been about in the first place.

And then, with a cry of anguish, Krueger burst into flames, running aimlessly around the vast room as the girls ducked for cover behind a massive boiler.

Kirsten peeked out and saw …

Nothing.

“Is he—?”

“I don’t know,” said Nancy. She stepped out and looked around.

On the floor was a single glistening steel blade.

She picked it up and grasped it tightly in her clenched fist.

“Nancy?” called a tired male voice.

Nancy looked into the darkness and saw …

“Neil!”

Nancy ran toward the man in the mist. She wanted so much to believe that the nightmare was over at last. The man extended his arms, and Nancy moved closer. It would be so wonderful if it were true, if this man who looked and sounded and acted like her beloved Neil were really who he claimed to be.

If only wishes could come true.

Nancy waited until she was in the man’s arms and then plunged the steel blade deep into his chest.

“Die, you son of a bitch,” said Nancy, pulling off Freddy’s mask as he swept upward with his carefully concealed glove, trying to pull away even as Nancy tightened her death grip, twisting the creature’s own blade deeper and deeper into his heart.

And then she felt his blades enter her chest, and she knew that only a few moments were left for her to do what needed to be done. Ignoring her own terrible pain, Nancy pulled the blades out of her chest and wrenched the dreadful glove off Freddy’s burnt and withered hand. With a cry of triumph, she tossed the bloody weapon to Kirsten.

Without a moment’s hesitation, Kirsten slipped the glove onto her own right hand. Immediately, she felt a power unlike anything she had known before. With a scream of rage, she rushed at the demon of her nightmares and slashed his throat from ear to ear with his own razor-sharp blades.

And then, to be sure, Kirsten pulled off the glove and plunged the blades directly into the creature’s merciless heart.

Freddy screamed and collapsed to the floor, his image seeming to flicker on and off like the picture on a poorly tuned TV. Kirsten freed

Nancy from the demon’s embrace and pulled her away from the rapidly fading creature.

“He’s dying,” whispered Nancy. Kirsten cradled her in her arms. “His house is burning, and his energy is almost gone. The nightmare is over.”

“Don’t talk,” said Kirsten, holding her tighter. She could hardly see Freddy now as she peered into the darkness. Nancy pulled her closer and whispered one last request in her ear.

“Don’t worry,” said Kirsten, nodding her head in agreement as tears filled her eyes, “I won’t let you die. I’m going to dream you into a beautiful dream forever.”

Both girls closed their eyes. Nancy smiled a smile for great peace and slowly began to fade away.

When Kirsten opened her eyes, she was alone.

Kirsten stood up and walked slowly to the spot on which Freddy Krueger had stood a few short moments ago. On the floor were a pile of ashes and four razor-sharp blades.

Kirsten wrapped the blades in a dirty rag and slipped them into her jacket pocket.

And then she was back in the basement of the burning house. Neil lay unconscious on the floor. Calmly, Kirsten threw open the cellar doors to let in the crisp, clean evening air. With greater strength than she had ever known before, Kirsten dragged Neil up the stairs and into the clear, starry night.

Chapter 10

Spring came early the following year.

The epidemic of teenage suicides had come to an abrupt halt, and many people naïvely credited the change in climate with having contributed to the sudden upswing in the spirit of the local young people. The new staff at Westin Hills kept silent, pleased by the turn of events but unwilling to put forth any theory of their own.

Neil Guiness and Kirsten Parker, meeting together for the first time in many months, carefully avoided the subject as well.

"I'm glad everything worked out for you," said Neil, sitting across from Kirsten at his dining room table.

"I think New York was just what I needed," the girl replied. "So many people. I never have to feel alone. Besides, I really needed to get away for a while after …" She hesitated, still not ready to put into words the unbelievable events of the previous year. "After what happened." She concluded.

"I know what you mean," said Neil, who had not seen any patients since the day Nancy died. He had tried writing a paper on the long chain of events that had led to her death, but he knew even before he began that no reputable journal would ever publish "A Nightmare on Elm Street."

Perhaps it's better that way, he thought.

Perhaps the world was not yet ready for the true story of Freddy Krueger.

There was a long pause in the conversation, and then Kirsten asked the question she had been waiting all evening to ask.

"Do you two still see each other?"

Neil reddened slightly and smiled. "I've been meaning to thank you for that," he said. "As a matter of fact, I'm seeing her tonight."

"Say hi for me, okay?" said Kirsten as she rose to leave.

"I'll do that," said Neil, now more eager than ever to get to sleep and meet once again with the girl of his dreams.

Kirsten was walking toward the front door when she noticed the model house on Neil's mantel.

"They were going to throw it out," he explained with a shrug. "I decided to save it as sort of a souvenir."

Kirsten studied the model for just a moment and then turned away

with a grim smile.

“Well, good night,” she said, kissing Neil on the cheek as the two surviving dream warriors fondly embraced.

“Good night, Kirsten. I hope you’ll visit again soon.”

“I will,” she said. “Sweet dreams.”

“Thanks to you,” he said. He watched her walk down the porch steps and then closed the door behind her. Alone again, he turned off the downstairs light and climbed the stairs to the bedroom.

Soon Neil would be fast asleep, expecting momentarily to step into Nancy’s warm and loving embrace.

He never noticed the light blinking on in the window of the tiny house on the mantel or heard the faint scraping of steel against steel in the miniature boiler room below.

The Life and Death of Freddy Krueger

Freddy Krueger was born amidst a raging fire in the old insane asylum on Elm Street, the bastard son of a beautiful young schizophrenic who died alone and unattended in the agony of childbirth. In later years, Freddy would distinctly remember his mother's screams of pain as the first sounds he ever heard.

Raised from infancy by a succession of ax murderers, rapists, and arsonists, young Freddy was adopted at an early age by a lonely old pimp who hoped that the strange-looking boy might someday make himself useful by luring curious drunks into the filthy alley in which his disease-ridden whores earned their meager pay. Whenever the old man would catch his adopted son enjoying the services of one of his employees, he would express his displeasure by beating the boy almost to the point of unconsciousness with a razor strop. It did not take young Freddy long to begin associating sexual pleasure with the infliction of pain.

Occasionally, the old man would punish Freddy for some imaginary offense by drawing blood from his belly with a straight razor. Refusing to cry out loud no matter how badly his sadistic father slashed him, the boy began to take a perverse sort of pleasure in fingering the narrow scars that soon covered the front of his body.

As a young man, Freddy showed no more aptitude as a pimp than the old man showed as a father. Finding the boy to be of no practical use, the old pimp paid no attention to him whatsoever except when doling out his daily punishment. After a while, Freddy began almost to welcome the beatings, which were the only expression of parental interest he was ever to know. Freddy finally decided to run away after being savagely beaten by his father and left for dead in the alley. Before he left, Freddy used the money he found in the old man's strongbox to hire a professional arsonist to torch his house while the old pimp slept peacefully upstairs.

Freddy never bothered to find out whether the old man survived the blaze.

With no formal schooling and no particular skills or aptitudes, Freddy wandered from town to town doing odd jobs and getting into trouble with the law. He began to drink heavily and spent many nights sleeping in the gutter. Freddy was sleeping in an alley near the local schoolhouse when a group of young boys decided to try picking

the drunk's pockets. One boy's hand was still in his pocket when Freddy awoke in a drunken rage and lashed out wildly with the bottle of gin clenched in his hand. The bottle landed on the boy's head with a loud crash as his four companions fled in terror. Freddy watched the boys run away and then looked thoughtfully at the child who was bleeding to death beside him in the alley. *They're scared of me,* he thought, strangely exhilarated as never before by the unfamiliar feeling of power that surged through his body like a shot of adrenaline.

Freddy carried the bleeding boy to a deserted cellar and studied his figure for a long time. *Children are useless,* he thought, repeating a sentiment he had often heard muttered by the old man who raised him. *Children are better off dead,* he thought, improvising freely on the theme. He reached into his pocket and took out the straight razor he had taken from the old man's closet before leaving home. Freddy roughly tore off the boy's clothing and studied his smooth white belly for a moment. Then, recalling the four boys who escaped, Freddy cut four deep incisions into the boy's flesh. He watched for a while as the blood spurted out, his face flushed with triumph. For the first time in his life, Freddy Krueger was in control. It was a feeling he did not want to live without ever again.

Freddy continued his nomadic existence until he arrived at the suburban community of Springwood. There was something about Springwood that instantly outraged him. Perhaps it was the well-cared-for lawns and lovely tree-lined streets that were so much more beautiful than anything he had even dreamed of as a child. Or perhaps it was the carefree children of Springwood so blissfully unaware of the suffering and anguish of the real world. Suddenly, Freddy knew his calling in life. He would teach these smug suburbanites and their children what the world was really all about.

He would teach them the true meaning of pain.

For the first time in his life, Freddy looked for a regular job, and he soon found one maintaining the boiler in the old generating plant on the outskirts of town. The work was easy enough, and it left Freddy with plenty of time to devote to his true calling. He soon decided that his old straight razor was insufficient to do the holy work that needed to be done. Freddy spent many hours in the machine shop, forging the deadly tool he would need to carry out his mission. These were among the happiest hours of his life—designing and then building the special glove with its four deadly fingerblades. Carefully, with a feeling akin to love, Freddy cut the gleaming metal, honing it to a fine, razor-sharp edge and then fitting the assembled apparatus into the fingerless leather glove. Then, when it was finally done, he took a deep breath and slipped the deadly talons onto his hand.

A perfect fit!

And now it was time to put his creation to the test.

The next day, Freddy slipped into his comfortable red and green sweater, donned his crumpled fedora, climbed into the front seat of his battered Chevy van, and drove into town. Lovingly, he clicked the blades that gleamed so beautifully on his right hand and waited patiently in the alley adjacent to Springwood Elementary School. He felt his muscles tense with excitement as the bell rang, announcing the end of another school day. For a fleeting moment, Freddy wondered what it would have been like to have gone to school with other children, to have had friends and to have played the innocent games of childhood. For that one brief moment, Freddy wondered if it might not be terribly wrong to interfere with the normal development of a child, to cut off at its very beginnings a human life of almost infinite possibilities and potentialities.

Then he saw the children, laughing and skipping as they rushed into their parents' loving arms, and Freddy knew what he had to do.

There was a little girl standing at the curb not far from the alley. Perhaps her mother had had difficulty starting the car or maybe a long line at the supermarket had set her schedule back a few minutes. No matter. The little girl was very much alone, and Freddy felt a stirring deep in his wicked soul. Squinting into the sunlight, he read the name "Amy" written in bright pink letters on the girl's lunchbox.

"Amy?" he whispered, but the girl didn't seem to hear him. "Amy," he repeated, a little louder this time. The girl looked at him with her large blue eyes.

"Come here," he said, beckoning to the girl with his left hand. She looked away for a moment, glancing up the street as if expecting her mother to arrive at any moment. Then she looked back at Freddy and he knew in that instant that he had won.

"Come here," he repeated. The girl hesitated for only a moment and then stepped into the alley.

"Who are you?" she asked in a small, sweet voice that set Freddy's teeth on edge.

"Uncle Freddy," he replied, liking the sound of it. "Your mother said I should bring you home."

The girl shook her head doubtfully.

"I don't have an Uncle Freddy," she said.

"You do now," said Freddy, raising his right hand high into the air. Then he brought it down, his temples pounding as his left hand covered the child's mouth and his right tore four deadly gashes in her soft belly. Freddy looked at the bloodied glove for a moment and felt

joy deep in his soul. How easily the little one had died! He lifted the girl's bloody body and carried it quickly to his parked van, feeling more alive than he had ever felt before. He stashed the body under some blankets in the back of the van and drove to the power plant. There he unloaded the body and hid it in a large unused storage locker in the back of the boiler room. Then he sat back and breathed deeply of the hot, stifling boiler room air that he had learned to love.

At last, Freddy's life had meaning.

After that, Freddy found it easy to fulfill his self-proclaimed destiny. His methods of abduction varied, but the result was always the same. He loved to see the newspaper accounts of the kidnapping, but it troubled him that no one knew for certain whether the missing children were dead. He began leaving puddles of blood at the murder sites so that everyone would know that these were not mere kidnappings. It was important to him that the smug parents of Springwood know that their children were being carefully and methodically butchered.

Freddy soon learned that leaving evidence around was not the wisest course for a murderer to pursue. One morning, a small squadron of police led by the intrepid Lieutenant Thompson burst into the power plant and found the rotting bodies of the town's murdered children. Freddy was arrested and brought to trial amid great publicity. Fortunately for Freddy, however, the public defender who handled the case was extremely thorough in his preparation. He examined the search warrant that had gained the police admittance to the power plant the day they arrested Freddy and found a technical error in the wording of the document. The search was ruled illegal, and the case against Freddy was thrown out of court. Despite public outcry, the Springwood Slasher was set free.

It was time to move on, and Freddy knew it. There would be other towns and other children. Next time, Freddy vowed, he would not be so easy to catch.

That night, Freddy packed his meager belongings into the back of his van and settled in for one last night's sleep before hitting the road. He had just settled into a cozy corner of the boiler room with a bottle of his favorite gin when he heard the commotion outside. The angry people of Springwood, led by Lt. Don Thompson and his wife Marge, had decided to take the law into their own hands. It was the Thompsons and their Elm Street neighbors, the Lantzes, who poured the gasoline around the power plant; and it was the Grays and the Lanes who set the fuel afire. Never again would their children—Nancy, Glen, Tina, Rod, and all the others—be terrorized by the wicked Fred Krueger. They smiled grimly as the power plant began to

burn, and someone in the mob applauded when Freddy appeared in the doorway, his red and green sweater burning brightly in the night. Even as the flames consumed his flesh, Freddy could be heard cursing the mob and screaming his vows of revenge. Then, with one last cry of agony, the burning figure turned from the crowd and raced madly into the very flames that were devouring him.

The body was never found.

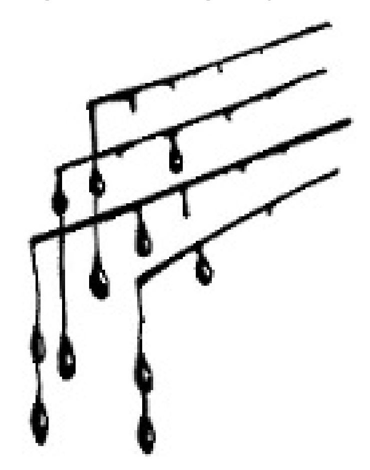
"I guess we've seen the last of Fred Kreuger," said Marge Thompson that night, breathing a deep sigh of relief as she examined Freddy's blood-caked finger-knives with a mixture of disgust and ill-concealed fascination.

But Marge was wrong.

Freddy would be back.

And the nightmare was just about to begin.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET



PART 4:

The Dream Master

A novel by Joseph Locke

Story by William Kotzwinkle and Brian Helgeland
Screenplay by Brian Helgeland and Scott Pierce

BASED ON THE CHARACTERS CREATED BY WES CRAVEN

NEW LINE CINEMA,
MEDIA HOME ENTERTAINMENT, INC. and
SMART EGG PICTURES Present
A ROBERT SHAYE Production
A RENNY HARLIN FILM

ROBERT ENGLUND in
A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 4:
THE DREAM MASTER

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Directed by RENNY HARLIN

Part One: KRISTEN

Chapter 1

Kristen's dream began with a particular kind of dread—thick and heavy and oppressive—that she hadn't felt in a long time. Almost two years, to be exact.

It began with a sound: a high-pitched screech, like a piece of chalk scraping over a hard surface.

As she walked through the darkness of her sleep, Kristen found that, in fact, the screech *was* being made by a piece of chalk. It was held in the dainty hand of a little girl hunkered on a clean Elm Street sidewalk beneath the clawing limbs of autumn-stripped trees. She was pressing the chalk to concrete and moving it with great care, the tip of her tongue protruding from the corner of her mouth, eyes squinting with concentration. She stopped now and then to choose another piece of chalk from a selection of multicolored pieces lined up by her right knee. Her blond curls danced gently in a sighing breeze.

Kristen walked cautiously down the sidewalk in the dim light of a dreamlike dusk, her feet crackling through the brittle leaves shed by the trees. She stopped behind the little girl and stared over her shoulder at the picture she was drawing.

It was a house … a very familiar house.

Kristen leaned forward to get a closer look. The house had an almost exaggerated cheerfulness: a picket fence, large windows, a healthy tree in front, fat with green leaves, and a bright sun shining from above.

But it was wrong. Kristen *knew* that house, and there was nothing cheerful about it. The house the little girl was drawing was Freddy's house, and there was nothing healthy about it, nothing good. She stood and sucked in her breath sharply because—

—it was there, Freddy's house, facing the street like a death's head. The paint was cracked and curling back like decaying skin, and the boarded windows resembled the sewn-up eyes of a corpse after an autopsy. The tree in the yard was skeletal and the pickets of the fence looked like dried bones filed to sharp points.

"Hello."

Kristen looked again at the girl, who was staring up with doelike eyes.

"Do … do you live here?" Kristen asked.

The corners of the girl's mouth turned downward slightly and she shook her head. "Nobody *lives* here."

Kristen whispered, "Where's Freddy?"

Covering her mouth with tiny fingers, the girl released a giggle that sounded like shattered teeth falling on metal. "He's not home."

When Kristen looked at the drawing again, the street darkened and her throat constricted. Standing in the window of the chalk house was a figure. It was crudely drawn but unmistakable: Freddy Krueger.

A bony hand of lightning clawed the sky and thunder clapped. Drops of rain speckled the sidewalk and the chalk drawing began to smear.

Kristen looked up and trembled beneath silently moving clouds that looked like bloodclots. Her chest filled with dread—

He's back, God help us, he's back.

—and she looked down again. The girl was gone. She looked in every direction, her eyes darting through the shadowy light, but she could not find the child.

The rain splashed onto the sidewalk and the chalk drawing melted quickly, its colors blending together into something that resembled spilled blood.

There was a sound from the house—a dry creaking—that made Kristen spin toward it with a gasp.

The front door was opening slowly, as if the house were opening its mouth in a yawn.

She felt no surprise; she'd expected it.

Lightning flashed, illuminating Kristen's surroundings, which were dissolving like the chalk drawing and spilling over the ground, flooding toward her in a rush, surrounding her and pushing her back …

… through the gate …

… toward the house …

Groaning with dread, Kristen stumbled up the walk that led to the open door. The slimy substance that chased her toward the house—a mix of dark colors and unidentifiable lumps—slapped against the steps as she lifted her lead-heavy feet onto the porch. It rose higher, as if in pursuit, and she looked briefly into the deadly-cold darkness beyond the open door, then stepped inside.

There were suddenly voices behind her … the voices of several singing children …

"One … two … Freddy's coming for you …"

Kristen spun around and saw them in the yard. They stood stiffly as

the multicolored slime oozed around their thin legs and rose quickly.

"… three … four … better lock the door …"

The thick substance made smacking sounds as it covered the porch and rushed toward the open door. Kristen whimpered, reached out to shut the door, but thought better of it; whatever lay behind her might be worse than what she was seeing.

She turned and looked into the dimly-lit house. Tattered curtains fluttered in the wind that blew through broken windows, and cobwebs trembled in dark corners. To the left, a staircase led into utter blackness and the house was filled with the silence of a tomb, until—

—a heavy clattering began at the top of the stairs, and Kristen cried out as an old, rusted tricycle tumbled down the stairs as slow as honey, hitting a step, turning slowly through the air, hitting another step, turning again …

The door slammed shut behind her.

"No!" she cried, spinning around and slapping her hand on the doorknob. She turned it, pulled the door open, threw herself out of the house and—

—it was all gone—the front yard, the slime, the children—and Kristen found herself, instead, inside the house once again, looking into the dusty decay of a house that had long been abandoned. She turned back, looked through the still open door and saw the same room on the other side.

He's trapped you, she thought. *You're on his turf.*

She moved toward the door, but it slammed shut. When she tried to open it again, the knob would not budge.

"Be calm, Kristen," she muttered unconvincingly. "Be calm."

She turned and looked past the staircase down the long hallway that ended in complete blackness. At the front of the hall and to the right, a door opened slowly with a long wavery groan. With nowhere else to go, Kristen moved forward and stepped through the door.

Old floorboards creaked beneath her feet as she entered the familiar living room. As the wind blew through the trees outside the dirty windows, shadows danced through the cobwebs and over the dusty sheets that covered the furniture.

Lightning turned the room an electric white, illuminating the yellowed old paintings on the walls: corpse-thin children with distended bellies, swollen lips, and eyes deepset in shadows, playing jacks and marbles and catch in graveyards and garbage dumps. Kristen gaped at the paintings as the lightning flickered, and she clutched her icy chest when she saw—

—the shadow of a hand with long knifelike fingers sweeping back

and forth over the wall.

The lightning died with a growl of thunder, leaving Kristen alone in the dark, her heart strafing her rib cage with machine-gun fire. Her lungs seized up and she couldn't draw a breath. When lightning flashed again, Kristen spun around with a scream trapped in her throat to see—

—a bony tree branch scraping the window.

Her body rushing with adrenaline, Kristen relaxed and sighed, even smiled a little as she moved toward the window.

Thunder hit like an earthquake.

The window shattered and snowflakes of glass blew inward. The gust of wind that followed hit Kristen like a cannonball in the pit of her stomach, knocking her backward and—

—down a set of metal stairs to a cold cement floor covered with grit and slime. She landed sprawled on her back and lay still a moment, staring up at the dripping pipes that twisted and tangled like one continuous intestine inside a gargantuan body.

The boiler room …

"No," Kristen breathed as she scrambled to her feet and looked around, all her relief gone. She felt as trapped as a caged animal. "N-Nuh-*No,* he's not here, he's … dead. Dead. He's not *here,* he's *dead,* Freddy's—"

She was interrupted by a sound …

The teeth-grinding skree of metal scraping metal nearby …

Freddy's knives …

Kristen forced the scream out the way she might force herself to vomit: *"Noooo!* Kincaid! Joey! Help me! *Help* me! Help—"

"—meeee!"

Kincaid's drooping head snapped up and he gasped, startled and disoriented. He was in his bedroom, seated at his desk, where he'd dozed off while reading a sports magazine.

The room was silent except for the soft wet snoring of Kincaid's mongrel, Jason, sleeping fitfully on the bed.

Kincaid frowned, looking around slowly and wondering what had awakened him so suddenly. Had his mother called him from down the hall? No, he was sure it hadn't been Mom; if *she* had called him, she'd *still* be shouting his name, until he answered.

No … it had come from … from—

—the mirror. He looked at his reflection in the rectangular mirror to his left. A thin film of perspiration glistened on his black skin, making

his dark blue T-shirt cling to the hard muscles of his back and shoulders.

Uh-uh, he thought, *sure wasn't no* mirror *woke me up, no* way. *I'm through with* that *shit, I'm not gonna*—

The mirror shimmered ever so slightly.

Jason woke, got to his feet and stared at the mirror with his scruffy black ears perked. After a moment the dog hopped to the floor with a whimper and scurried under the bed.

The smooth surface of the looking glass began to swirl as if being sucked down a drain, and Kincaid's chair began to tremble beneath his heavy muscular frame.

"Oh, shit," he whispered, "I'm asleeee—"

Before he finished the word, Kincaid was sucked out of his chair and across the room into the whirlpool of spinning reflections. He screamed in an uncharacteristically high voice—a voice he'd be ashamed of under normal circumstances—flailing his arms and legs as he fell and fell and fell until—

—he landed with the painlessness of dreams on a hard wet surface. He blinked, shook his head with a jerk, and looked up into a pair of wide frightened blue eyes.

"Awww, *shit,* Kristen," Kincaid groaned, getting to his feet, "not again. I thought we—"

She held up a palm: "Shh! *Listen."*

Rolling his eyes, Kincaid listened a moment. "I don't hear *nothin'.* What's yo—"

A sound … metal against metal … clinking … scraping …

Kincaid's back stiffened. It *couldn't* be. They were *through* with all of this … with *him.* It had *ended,* and there was no reason for Kristen to pull him into her dreams anymore. He tried to bury his fear with anger, but—

—he heard the sound again.

Kincaid spun around.

Several feet away, about a dozen pulley chains dangled from above in the musty darkness; drops of moisture clung to their links and, as the chains swayed gently, the rusted hooks at the end of each one clanked and scraped together.

Kincaid faced Kristen again, genuinely angry with his friend this time. "You are one spooked chick, you know that?"

Her shoulders drooped with relief and she smiled, started to speak, but froze and gasped, "Listen!" as—

—footsteps scraped over the grimy concrete and a tall lanky figure

with a long pale face emerged from the shadows.

Kincaid stumbled backward with a doglike yelp and Kristen cried out as—

—Joey stepped between them.

Trying to cover his fear immediately with cool nonchalance, Kincaid snapped, “She pulled *you* into this too?”

“Joey, thank God!” Kristen gasped. “I thought—”

“Thought what?” Joey said, irritated. “Thought you’d drag us in here?”

Kincaid felt better knowing he was not alone in his indignation, and he and Joey glared at Kristen.

“I-It’s Freddy,” she stammered. “He’s here.”

“Chill *out,* Kristen,” Kincaid snapped. “Freddy’s *dead.* Buried and consecrated. We *won,* remember? We watched him *fry.* He disappeared right in *front* of us!”

She shook her head insistently. “No, no. He’s come back … to get us.”

Joey stepped toward her angrily. “No way, Kincaid’s right, Fred Krueger is history. C’mere …” He took her hand and led her to the boiler. It hunkered in a corner like a great metal beast with a fat rusted belly. “Look,” he said, jerking the stubborn latch and swinging open the iron door, “the boiler’s cold. See for yourself.”

Kristen flinched as Joey positioned her in front of the yawning boiler and lifted her arm to press her hand to the cold iron. She moved her hand over it and looked inside cautiously. After a moment she faced them, her hand still on the boiler.

“I don’t know, guys,” she said quietly. “I still have the feeling—”

There was an abrupt sound within the boiler, and something shot out the open door in a blur of white fangs and pink gums and—

—Kincaid recognized his dog Jason as—

—the growling animal closed its jaws on Kristen’s forearm and knocked her to the floor and—

—Kincaid jerked his head off his desk again and looked around his bedroom.

The mirror was still and lifeless.

The muffled rumble of the dishwasher came from the kitchen.

Kincaid looked over his shoulder at his bed. Jason lay curled on the covers, dozing. The dog lifted his head lazily.

Blood was smeared on Jason’s muzzle.

Kincaid whistled softly through his teeth as—

• • •

—Joey awoke with a start, his water bed sloshing beneath him.

As he wobbled on the mattress's gentle wakes, Joey clutched the covers and looked around his room quickly, reassuring himself that he was awake. Then he buried his face in his palms and groaned as—

—Kristen threw her covers off and swung her legs over the edge of the bed, her breasts heaving with each heavy breath. A throbbing pain crawled up her left arm. She lifted it slowly, dreading what she might see.

Blood dribbled from the small puncture marks left by the dog's sharp teeth …

Chapter 2

The top was down on Kristen's Volkswagen Rabbit and the sun warmed her as she slowed to a stop in front of Alice Johnson's house.

A bird sang from the branches of an elm as Kristen got out of the car. Down the street a dog barked and a child laughed a long giddy laugh. It was a pleasant neighborhood, modest, but well kept and attractive.

Just the kind of neighborhood Freddy likes …

Kristen wrestled the thought down into the dark basement of her mind, from where it had come. It wasn't even nine o'clock yet, and the day seemed endless because, since she woke up, Kristen had been fighting to keep her mind off last night's dream.

It didn't mean anything, she'd told herself again and again. *It was just a dream, that's all. Maybe I* didn't *actually pull Kincaid and Joey into it, and maybe I hit my arm on the nightstand when I woke up, and—*

—maybe Freddy's really *back …*

Her longsleeved shirt couldn't hide the slight bulge of gauze wrapped around her left arm. She fingered the bandage as she walked around to the side door of Alice's house and rang the bell.

Dennis Johnson opened the door, distractedly tying his tie.

"How are you, Mr. Johnson?" Kristen asked, stepping into the kitchen.

His only response was a cold and weary sidelong glance as he turned to the kitchen counter and poured a healthy shot of vodka into a glass of tomato juice.

"Mm, that's nice," Kristen muttered sarcastically.

He seldom spoke to her—or to *anyone*—and always looked as if he were on the verge of breaking into an angry tirade. Ever since Mrs. Johnson's death after a long fight with cancer almost two years earlier, Mr. Johnson had closed up tighter than a triple-locked strongbox. His only friend was alcohol, and he wore his hangovers like long pale masks.

"Hi, Kristen," Alice said, entering the kitchen. "Rick'll be down in a sec."

Mr. Johnson gave his daughter a frowning once-over and asked sternly. "You going out dressed like *that?"*

Alice's red hair fell to her shoulders in flat lifeless strands, and she

wore no makeup; her poorly matched clothes were baggy and made her look shapeless.

Closing her eyes, bracing herself, Alice hugged her books to her breasts and asked, “What’s wrong with me *this* time?”

“Um, I’ll just wait outside,” Kristen muttered, embarrassed.

“No, don’t,” Mr. Johnson drawled sarcastically. *“You’re* a pretty girl, Kristen. Maybe *you* can help her.” Shaking his head disgustedly, he turned away as the girls walked out.

Kristen ached for Alice; she wasn’t a homely girl by *any* means, but no one besides Kristen and Alice’s older brother Rick ever told her that. She never wore makeup or fixed her hair, and gave no thought to her clothes, but those things were incidental; all Alice *really* lacked was confidence and self-respect.

Outside, after Mr. Johnson slammed the kitchen door behind them, something clambered overhead and the girls looked up to see Rick crawling out his bedroom window. He hugged the branch of a tree beside the house, shimmied halfway down, and dropped the last three feet to land, smiling, in front of Kristen and Alice. He gave Kristen a quick kiss and she felt a slight tingle rush through her. They had been going steady for about three months now, and a simple kiss still held excitement. Rick was tall and slender with dark hair moussed into spikes; his face always gave the impression he was about to tell a wicked joke, and his eyes never lost their twinkle, even when he was upset.

“Something wrong with the stairs?” Kristen laughed.

Rick shook his head, putting his arm around her. “Avoid-all-contact Day.”

“What?”

“When Dad’s popping aspirins like Life Savers, it’s Avoid-all-contact Day.”

As if on cue, the door jerked open and Mr. Johnson glared out, wearing a little tomato-juice mustache. “What’re you, waiting for a *limo?”*

Rick bounced up the steps, put his hands on his dad’s shoulders and, mocking Ricky Ricardo, chirped, “Hokay, hahnee, hime off to-dee clahb!” then kissed Mr. Johnson on the mouth.

Sweeping his hand over his lips, Mr. Johnson scowled and slammed the door again.

Kristen pulled into the student parking lot of Springwood High School and parked in a slot beside Debbie Steven’s charcoal-gray Mazda.

Alice Johnson looked on admiringly as Debbie stood—*No,* Alice

thought, *it's more like a pose*—beside her car, applying lipstick while looking into a small compact mirror. Hard rock boomed from the speakers of the car.

Debbie was not classically attractive—unlike Kristen, whose blond hair, blue eyes, and sculpted face made her beauty difficult to hide—but she did a good job of making up for it. A short tight skirt, black cropped top, and black leather jacket showed off her curves, while plenty of makeup and full, curly, bronze-tinted hair improved her plain, rather blocky features.

Alice had a great deal of respect for Debbie, who came from what Alice suspected Debbie thought was the wrong side of the tracks; she lived on the south side of Springwood, where her father ran a junkyard and her grossly obese mother sat around eating M&M's and Dorritos all day; so, in an effort to put that behind her, she tended to overcompensate by being a gorgeous social butterfly. Debbie was a little rough around the edges, but Alice liked and admired her for being able to rise above her disadvantaged background.

"All right, anybody have trig this semester?" Debbie called as Kristen killed the ignition.

"What happened?" Rick asked as they got out of the Rabbit.

"I had a conflict. Homework or *Dynasty*. *Dynasty* won."

"A sad story," Rick said. "Soaps'll kill you."

Alice's attention was caught by a familiar red pickup, as it pulled into the lot, and she leaned against Kristen's car and watched it park. There was a flutter in her chest as Dan Jordan got out of the truck in tight blue jeans, a black T-shirt, and a green and white letter jacket, his short black hair tossed slightly by the gentle breeze.

Debbie took notice, too, cocking a brow and purring. "Mmmm-*mm,* we're talkin' one major-league *hunk."*

Alice watched as he slammed the truck door and … and … and—

*—he turned to her and smiled as their eyes met, ambling toward her with a boyish grin. As he neared, Alice grinned, tilted her head and purred—exactly as Debbie had—"Mmm-*mm, *you know, you are one major-league* hunk," *then put a hand on his waist and stepped closer.*

He chuckled and looked away bashfully. "Well, um, thuh-thank you, Alice, but-um—"

"Earth to Alice," Rick singsonged, waving a hand before her face. "Earth to Alice. Hey, you spacing again?"

Embarrassed, she whispered, "Rick, *please."* It was just another daydream, the kind her dad was always complaining about … the kind of thing for which he seemed to despise her so. Alice was relieved when the sputter of Sheila Kopecky's Vespa scooter drew

attention from her.

"All *right,"* Debbie said. "I think I see salvation."

Sheila was a black girl with light chocolatey skin, nerdy thick glasses, and hair pulled back in a ponytail. She parked her scooter, got off and unstrapped the bundle of books and papers from behind the seat.

"How can you ride that health hazard?" Debbie asked. "It's no wonder you have asthma."

"Asthma is an *inherited* condition," Sheila said. "If you read a book now and then, you might know something."

"Speaking of books, isn't trig your favorite?"

Sheila rolled her eyes. *"Dynasty* again? Girl, do us a favor. Get a VCR." From a pocket, she produced an asthma inhaler, slipped it between her lips and took a few puffs.

From a few yards away Terence Brady, a cocky black jock with a bulging T-shirt, called, "Hey, baby, you're sucking on the wrong nozzle."

Sheila turned away, embarrassed, but Debbie stepped forward, lips curled in a harsh sneer, her fist clutching her lunch bag a little harder, and replied, "Hey-yo, *needledick,* I bet you're the only male on campus suffering from penis envy!"

Alice laughed as Brady stared in confusion, then walked away.

Sheila released a staccato laugh and patted Debbie on the shoulder. "All *right,* girl, I owe you one."

"Really?" Debbie asked, reaching into her bag and removing a piece of dried fruit. "Well, how about—" She stopped, cried out and dropped the piece of fruit, shuddering as she stepped back.

Everyone, including Alice, stepped forward and looked down at the fruit. A large roach skittered over it, antennae quivering this way and that.

"Eewww!" Debbie cried, slamming her heel on the insect and twisting her foot again and again. "That is *sooo* disgusting!" She continued twisting her foot and stomped a few times.

"Hey, Supergirl," Rick chuckled, "I think it's dead. Give a bug a break, huh?"

She stopped, stepped back, her face still twisted in disgust, shuddered again, then turned away.

Alice was surprised. As tough as she was, Debbie was *still* afraid of a measly little cockroach.

Kincaid and Joey met Kristen at her locker, and she could tell by the

looks on their faces that last night’s dream had not been just *any* dream.

“Hi, guys,” she said hesitantly.

“Hi, guys?” Kincaid snorted. “That’s all you got to say after last night?”

“Look, I’m *telling* you, he’s coming *back,”* she whispered.

Kincaid relaxed a little, became more sympathetic. “Listen, little sister, we know you got this freako talent for bringing folks into your dreams, but we don’t *need* it anymore. Time to live like regular people.”

“Yeah, let it rest,” Joey agreed. “’Sides, who knows, you might stir him back up if you keep going in. Kincaid and I’ll help, we’re still a team. But we *all* have better things to dream about.”

“You got *that* right, signed and sealed,” Kincaid added, slapping Joey’s palm.

She looked at them, wanting to believe, but couldn’t. “Then what about *this?”* she asked, rolling up her sleeve over the bandage.

Kincaid rolled his eyes. “Dat don’t mean *dick.* My dog’s just like *me.* Drag him into your crazy dream and he gets *wild!”*

On his way down the hall Rick waved, and Kristen and the guys noticed.

“Here comes your boyfriend,” Kincaid chuckled. “Can’t *he* give you a good night’s sleep?”

Rick put his arm around Kristen and said, “We don’t kiss and tell. How about *you* guys?”

Kincaid was ready with an angry comeback, but Joey led him away by the arm, and Kristen watched them disappear down the crowded hall.

“Those guys are kind of, um, spooky,” Rick said in her ear.

“Then you must think I’m a total *freak,”* she laughed.

“I go back and forth.” He kissed her forehead.

Kristen looked down the hall again. “No, they’re okay. We’ve … been through a lot together …”

Chapter 3

It was the time of day Alice hated the most: time for Dad to come home. She was standing at the sink washing dishes when she heard his car drive up. It ran over the garbage cans with a clatter; he was drunk again. Rick was in the garage practicing for his martial-arts class, and she heard his abrupt movements cease when Dad's car door slammed.

"First one of the day, scout's honor," Dad said apologetically as he came in through the kitchen door. He swayed slightly as he walked. "I'm late, I know. Damned contracts …"

"We waited a long time," Alice said quietly.

Rick shuffled in and added, "But we gave up. As usual."

Taking a salad bowl out of the refrigerator, Alice followed her dad into the dining room and began serving dinner.

He looked at the salad before him and snapped, "You call this vegetation a *meal* after a ten-hour workday? What the hell am I? A *rabbit?* Christ, Alice, can't you try to *think* a little more?"

Heading back into the kitchen, Alice stopped with her back to her dad and … and … and—

—she faced him angrily, rushed forward and slapped a hand on the table, speaking through clenched teeth: "Yeah, I can think! *I can think of how* tired *I am of watching you drink your life away! I can think of how* sick *I am of you taking Momma's death out on* me!"

He gaped at her in shock, mouth hanging open, and—

—Dad said, "Am I speaking in *tongues?* Alice, I'm *talking* to you. Are you awake, or *what?"*

"Dad, don't start," Rick said quietly.

"Start what? Telling the little daydreamer to wake up? It's long overdue." He got up and went for his coat. "Hell with this. Aggravation I *don't* need."

Alice stood at the kitchen sink as long as she could. She listened to him storm out, listened to him drive away. Then the tears came, and she hurried to her room …

Kincaid had tried for hours to do his homework, but he couldn't concentrate. He'd finally undressed, put on his sweat pants and T-shirt, and laid down on the bed. Sleep came as easily as concentration, so he grabbed up a handful of darts and tossed them from the bed to

the board on the wall across the room, trying hard not to think … about Kristen … about her dreams … and, most of all, about *him* …

About Freddy.

But it wasn't easy.

As the darts thunked against the board, Kincaid's bedroom door creaked open slowly and he froze. Kincaid sat up on the bed, startled, and saw—

—a shadow on the bedroom floor … it *looked* like the shadow of a tilted pointy hat on a long head …

It was only Jason.

Kincaid sighed and slapped the mattress. "C'mon, Jason, c'mere, boy!"

Jason hopped onto the bed and curled up between Kincaid's legs. The dog's warmth made him feel a little better, a little safer. He put the darts on the nightstand and leaned his head back on the pillow … closed his eyes … and—

—he jerked awake again. But it was dark, now—*very* dark—and Kincaid reached for the light on the nightstand.

His hand struck hard cold metal. It was all around him—below him, above him, and at each side—and his breathing quickened, his stomach sick with panic as he pounded at the surface above him. It rattled, clanged, and—

—opened. He was in the trunk of a car.

Cold night air wafted in as Kincaid sat up in the trunk. Outside, there was only the black night sky above and battered old cars all around, for as far as he could see.

"Hey," he said, feeling more and more afraid, "this ain't *my* dreamland." He climbed out of the trunk and looked around. He was in an old wrecking yard. Cars were stacked like corpses outside of Auschwitz. Kincaid sucked in a deep breath and cried, "Kristen! *Kristen!* If you're here, I'm gonna *pound* your ass!"

There was no reply, only a familiar scratching. It was the sound of Jason's paws pattering through dirt. The dog was a few yards away, trotting toward Kincaid. Jason stopped and stared at him.

"Jason!" He was relieved to see a familiar sight. But as he neared the dog, Jason's lip pulled back over sharp teeth and the dog growled softly. "Hey … it's *me,* Jason."

The dog turned away from him and began digging furiously in the dirt, paws pedaling so fast, they were nearly a blur. Kincaid drew nearer, but cautiously, no longer trusting his pet. The ground began to

collapse beneath Jason's swiping paws, and Kincaid was struck with a sudden feeling of dread. He rushed forward to stop the dog's digging, but Jason spun on him and snapped, growled, and—

—Jason lifted his hind leg to piss, but instead of urine, a stream of fire shot from between the dog's legs, and the hole Jason had dug ignited. Jason bounded away from the fire, yelping, then stopped and turned back, body tensed, ready to run away.

Kincaid watched as the flames rose six … seven … ten feet into the air; the ground beneath him began to tremble and crack, and a red glow oozed from the opening as if Hell itself were being revealed. The flames died down as the ground separated, leaving a red glowing pit where there had once been a small hole.

Kincaid and Jason moved slowly toward the crevice and looked over the edge.

A pile of human bones lay in the flickering glow; a foot or so away from them lay a hat. It was a very *familiar* hat.

The bones quivered … moved … then, with frightening speed—

—the bones slid together, joints thunking as they were rejoined, separated ribs clattering as they became whole, vertebrae snapping into a column, fingers clicking together, teeth rattling back into their sockets, and—

—Jason barked fearfully, backing up several steps, then turned and ran away as—

—tissue began to form on the bones; muscles melted together and veins and arteries appeared in trails over the glistening substance, then skin, spreading like moisture over a windowpane, covered the body completely as eyes rose from within the skull to fill the empty sockets and—

—Freddy smiled up at Kincaid from the pit and sneered, "You shouldn't've buried me. *I'm … not … dead."* He reached for his hat and dusted it off.

Kincaid wasted no time. He turned and ran for the wall of rusty battered cars, sidling between two of them, then climbing onto another, hiding behind an old crumpled Vega, where he could watch without being seen.

Flames shot from the pit, and the earth rumbled again as it closed. When the flames died out, Freddy stood where they had once burned. He lifted his right hand—razor-sharp knives extended from each finger—and slid the blades together as he chuckled. They played a deadly note. He walked slowly toward the wall of cars behind which Kincaid hid.

Kincaid closed his eyes a moment and summoned the extraordinary

strength that came to him only in dreams, then waited until Freddy was standing in just the right spot beneath him.

Kincaid hooked his hands beneath the frame of the Vega and heaved.

The car tumbled through the air and landed flat on Freddy.

After a moment Kincaid whooped with joy: “Take *that,* muthah-fuckahhh!” His words echoed through the graveyard of automobiles. He jumped to the ground and grinned at the place where Freddy had stood, waiting for his dream to end.

It didn’t.

The headlights of every dead car around him came on, shining with an unnatural brightness. Horns wailed like the voices of dying children.

Kincaid spun around and around, thinking, *It’s over, it’s over! How come I’m not* awake *yet?*

Metal scraped piercingly behind him, and Kincaid spun around to see Freddy emerging from between two cars, dragging his knives along the rusted body of one as he grinned and rasped, “One down … two to go …”

Kincaid tried to run, but Freddy was faster. The blades glittered in the light of the cars’ headlights an instant before they plunged into Kincaid’s gut. Freddy pushed them upward as he flashed his rotting teeth. His breath smelled like decayed meat in Kincaid’s nostrils.

Kincaid felt blood rising in his throat, and it sprayed from his mouth as he gurgled, “Kiss … my … ass. I’ll … see you … in *helllll …”*

Freddy tilted his head, perversely jovial, and said, “Tell ’em, *Freddy* sent yuh!” His hellish laugh echoed in Kincaid’s ears as—

—his eyes snapped open moments before his death. Jason was hunkered beside him, whining pitifully. Kincaid clutched his stomach, expecting to find blood, but there was nothing.

The dog licked Kincaid’s cheek as he tried to call Kristen’s name.

He died first …

“At least *you* guys don’t complain about *your* food,” Alice muttered as she sprinkled fish food into the small aquarium in her room. Capping the food again, she went to her vanity. Its large mirror was almost completely obscured by photographs taped to the glass, some overlapping others, some covered entirely. They were pictures of Sheila and Debbie, Kristen and Rick, Rick and herself, but her favorites were the pictures of Alice, Rick, and their mother together.

There were a *lot* of those. She'd been so pretty before she got sick, before the cancer began chewing up her insides. Somewhere on the mirror were a couple of pictures of her dad, but she didn't look for them. They were probably covered up, anyway.

"Sorta defeats the purpose, doesn't it?" Rick asked, coming into the room.

"What!"

"The mirror. You can't see yourself in it."

"That's the point. I don't want to." She went to her bed and sat on the edge. "You know, if Mom were still alive, Dad wouldn't treat us like he does."

"Nah, c'mon, his mind is doing the freestyle in Cuervo Gold. He doesn't mean it."

"You know, sometimes I really *want* to be what he wants, and other times I just don't care. The problem is, when I look in the mirror, I'm never what *I* want to be."

"That's 'cause you can't see yourself, like I said. You know, if you took a good close look, you might surprise yourself. You've just gotta … chase a few dreams. Find out what you *want* to be, then go for it."

She shook her head distractedly.

"It's all in your head."

"What?"

"Your mind pictures you doing something, and your body reacts. Like this." He stood straight, kicked a leg high into the air while jerking back his elbows, and shouted. *"Fight!* See? Like that. C'mon, you try it."

"Me? I can't do that."

"Sure you can." He pulled her from the bed and stood her in the center of the room. "Okay … like this." He repeated the kick. "Now, go ahead."

She gave it a half-hearted try and nearly fell over.

Rick gave her a polite Japanese bow and said, "Ah, Alice-san, you must have balance. Now, try again."

With the next kick her shoe flew across the room and plopped into the aquarium.

Alice laughed and buried her face in Rick's chest.

"Well, you've got pretty good aim," he chuckled. He put his arms around her and gave her a squeeze. "So you're not a martial-arts expert, so what? You've just gotta keep shopping around, and when you find what you want to be, give it your all. Okay?"

"That's easy for you to say. You've got a personality."

"So do you," he said, kissing her forehead. "You're the only one who doesn't *know* it yet."

Joey lay on his water bed, idly sloshing the mattress with his foot. MTV was on, the volume low, but Joey ignored it in favor of the poster on the wall across the room. It was a picture of a beautiful blonde stretched out on a tigerskin rug. She wore a yellow bikini that concealed little, and she looked directly at Joey with promise and invitation.

"Mm-mm," he breathed, locking his hands behind his head and allowing himself to relax—he even began to doze a little—as he stared at the poster … wishing … imagining … dreaming …

He thought of how she might feel and smell, how she might taste, and he had a nearly perfect image of her standing beside his bed when —

—a jarring movement startled him from his fantasy and made him sit up. The water bed was sloshing furiously, almost as if something were … *inside* the mattress!

Joey turned, clutched the bottom sheet and pulled it away from the mattress, looked through the transparent vinyl, and gasped when he saw—

—a figure swimming in the water beneath him, backed by a soft glow. It was a woman … a *naked* woman … and she *looked* like …

No, Joey thought, *couldn't be, it* couldn't *be!*

He looked up at the poster. The girl was gone; all that was left on the tigerskin was the yellow bikini lying in a tiny heap.

Inside the mattress the girl moved gracefully, her blond hair flowing around her head liquidly, her small firm breasts pressed flat to the vinyl as her lips silently formed his name: *Jooo-eeey …*

Joey knew he was dreaming. The poster girl had come to him in his dreams before, but she'd never been inside his *bed.* "What a great bed!" Joey laughed, getting on his hands and knees, pressing a palm to one breast. He felt it beneath the vinyl, but for only a moment, then —

—the girl began to sink, fading into the soft glow that came from deep within the water.

"Wait! Come back!" he called. But only water slurped quietly inside the mattress. Joey sighed and started to put the sheet back when he saw—

—slight movement deep in the water again. Something was nearing

the surface, swimming upward quickly, and a hand reached toward Joey, but it wasn't just *any* hand, and it wasn't *her* hand, because—

—there were knives extending from the fingers, coming up faster and faster until—

—they sliced cleanly through the vinyl and Freddy rose out of the water with a great splash, wrapping his arm around Joey's neck smoothly and holding him close in a deadly embrace.

Joey felt as if the bottom of his stomach had fallen out as he struggled helplessly. Defeat overwhelmed him and he cried out in a childlike voice: *"Nooo! Nuh-nooooo!"*

"How's *this* for a wet dream?" Freddy sneered, his laughter filling the room as Joey continued to fight.

"Help! Kristen! Help me!"

"Two down … one to gooo …"

"Kristen, plee-heeze hel—"

Freddy pulled Joey into the water and they went down … farther and farther … until Joey's lungs burned for breath and his skull felt as if it were being crushed, and then—

—there was nothing.

Not even dreams—

When Joey's mom came into his room to say good night, she clicked her tongue when she saw the television was still playing that wretched MTV. She couldn't understand the attraction …

"This garbage," she muttered, turning it off. She turned to his bed. The covers were in a heap. "Joey?" she said quietly. "C'mon, give your old mom a kiss." She went to the bed and carefully pulled the covers back and saw that—

—the bottom sheet was gone. So was Joey. She whipped the sheets back and—

—her scream sounded through the entire house as she stared at her son's dead body—*inside* the water-bed mattress …

Chapter 4

On a bench in front of the school the next morning, Kristen's hand trembled as she lit a cigarette. Sleep had been scarce the night before and she'd had too much coffee before coming to school.

The night had been filled with voices—Kincaid's and Joey's—calling her name.

She'd been looking for the boys since she'd arrived that morning but hadn't found them, and her stomach was tangled in an anxious knot.

When a hand touched her shoulder, Kristen jerked around to find Alice. "There you are," Alice said. "Where are you this morning? Rick's been looking all over for you."

Kristen clutched Alice's arm. "Have you seen Kincaid or Joey? I can't find them. *Anywhere.*"

"I haven't seen them." Alice sat beside her.

"I called them, but no one answered. Not even their parents." When Alice frowned with concern, Kristen tried to calm herself. "We have matching luggage," she chuckled.

"Huh?"

"The bags under your eyes. I've got 'em, too, see? Nightmares?"

Alice nodded.

"God, I hate dreaming."

"I love to dream," Alice said. "I just hate the ones about my dad."

"You could do a lot worse, believe me." Kristen stamped out her cigarette. "How do you handle your dreams?"

Alice brightened. "My mom taught me when I was little. Ever heard of the dream master?"

"Sounds like a game-show host."

"No, really. It was like a teddy bear, or something. The 'guardian of good dreams.' Gave me confidence."

"You know his phone number?"

Alice laughed. "Sorry. There was a rhyme, I think. But I've forgotten it."

"So what do you do now?"

"Now I just try really hard to dream of someplace fun. Remember … *you're* in control. You are your own dream master."

Kristen was silent a moment. "I used to bring people into my

dreams.”

“You *what?”*

“When I had nightmares, I’d bring people in to help me.” She could tell Alice was skeptical. “Never mind. It’s kinda complicated.” The bell rang through the campus, and Kristen stood, forced a smile. “Well, we better go before your brother starts a search party.”

Kincaid and Joey had Mr. Bryson’s English class with Kristen, and, as she walked down the hall with Rick and Alice, she prayed they would be there. If they weren’t … well, she didn’t know *what* she would do.

They were late and the class was already full, and when they walked in, everyone turned to see who was tardy. Kristen scanned the room quickly and gasped when she saw that—

—Kincaid’s and Joey’s desks were empty.

Kristen’s heart froze.

She stumbled backward and tried to find her voice. “Kincaid … Joey … my God, he got them … oh, God, he *got* them!”

Rick grabbed her arm and hissed, “Kristen, what’s the matter?”

She faced him and sputtered, “They’re guh-gone, he *got* them, my Guh-God, he *got* them! *Killed* them!”

Alice stepped toward her and Rick tried to pull Kristen toward him. She spun away and threw herself toward the open door but tripped on Rick’s foot and—

—she felt herself falling, saw the floor sweeping up to meet her, saw the doorjamb an instant before her skull cracked against it, and—

—the light around her began to fade and the voices of her classmates sounded more and more distant, until—

—Kristen opened her eyes and looked up at the glaring fluorescent lights of the infirmary. The school nurse smiled down at her. The woman’s face was square and homely, her dark hair in short curls; her watery brown eyes peered through owlish glasses, and she wore too much perfume.

“Feeling better now?” the nurse asked.

“Yuh-Yeah. I g-guess so. What happened?”

“You had quite a nasty bump.” The nurse’s voice was soft and prissy.

Kristen tried hard to focus her senses; when she remembered what had happened just before she bumped her head, she tried to sit up and blurted, “I gotta get outta here!”

The nurse pushed her down again. “You just stay put. You need your rest.”

“No, no,” Kristen hissed urgently. “You don’t get it. He’s *after* me …”

“Don’t worry, honey. Everything’s fine.” The nurse smiled again, showing her small, ugly teeth, and turning away, hunching over a small chrome table. She fumbled with something for a moment.

Kristen tried to relax, but the light was so *bright.* And the room was so clean and neat and … *white.* With a jolt, she felt that something was suddenly very wrong and looked at the nurse suspiciously.

The woman’s white uniform was stretched tight over her back and began to spread with bright red stains.

Kristen frowned, sat up and watched as the stains grew larger, almost as if … as if something were oozing through the material from underneath … something like—

—blood.

The nurse spun around quickly and held up an enormous syringe, and Kristen looked at her face to see that she was—

—Freddy!

He laughed deep in his chest and sneered, “Just lie back … I need to draw a little *blood!”*

Kristen screamed as she rolled off the examination table and—

—her eyes snapped open as she lay on the examination table.

The school nurse smiled down at her, peering through owlish glasses, and said, “Feeling better now?”

Kristen took a deep breath and let relief wash through her.

This was the *real* school nurse; she was homely too … but she *wasn’t* Freddy …

Chapter 5

Later that afternoon at the Crave Inn, Alice was just ending her shift as a waitress and was standing behind the register getting her things together when Dan walked in. She felt her throat constrict when he walked toward her, smiling.

"Hi," he said. "Is Rick around?"

"Um … no. Rick stayed late at school. K-Kristen wasn't feeling well."

"Ah. You are his sister, right?"

"Uh-huh. A-Alice."

"I'm Dan. Rick and I are supposed to go work out later. If he comes in, I'll be over there." He joined a couple of other guys at a corner table and Debbie hurried over to take his order.

Alice watched him dreamily for a while, until Sheila walked in and stepped in front of her, laughing. "Hunk alert! Hunk alert!"

Alice rolled her eyes and got her purse.

"Look, I can't wait around for you today," Sheila said. "I've gotta get to the library before it closes. *Killer* physics test tomorrow."

"I know. And *I'm* not ready."

Debbie came to the counter, scribbling on her order pad. "He is *so* cute," she whispered. "I wonder where he works out."

"Girl," Sheila said, "you know, there *is* life after exercise. Someday, you'll learn to appreciate my motto."

"And what's that?"

"Mind … over matter," she whispered dramatically, then laughed.

The bell over the door clanged as Rick hurried in with Kristen shuffling behind him. She looked as if she'd been crying.

"C'mon, Alice," Rick said urgently, "we've gotta get outta here."

"What's going on?"

He whispered, "Kincaid and Joey died last night."

"What! *How?"* Gooseflesh shriveled the back of Alice's neck when she remembered how concerned Kristen had been about them. Did she know something? Alice turned to Kristen and took her arm as Rick hurried over to Dan's table. "What happened?"

"Look," Kristen whispered, "you're gonna hear all kinds of stories, but I know what *really* happened." She began to cry softly. "How could I have let him get them … after all we've been through together

… we were a *team.* I'm going to get that son of a *bitch."*

"Who?"

Kristen shook her head evasively and called, "C'mon, Rick, let's go."

Alice got her purse, tossing a wave to Debbie and Sheila, who looked puzzled—"I'll fill you in later," Alice assured them—and followed Rick and Kristen out, surprised to see Dan coming after her.

"Mind if I come?" he asked, looking a bit confused.

Alice shrugged bashfully, and they got into Rick's car. Dan sat in the back seat with her. As Rick pulled away from the diner, Alice asked, "Will somebody tell me what's going on?"

Kristen took a deep breath, as if composing herself, and asked, "Ever heard of Fred Krueger? *Freddy* … Krueger?"

"What, that creaky old town legend?" Dan laughed.

"It's *not* a legend. It's a true story. He was a child molester. A child *killer.* He lived on Elm street. Killed a lot of kids in an old abandoned boiler room. He used to torture them, then he'd … cut them up with a glove he'd made out of metal with long blades on the fingers. After he was finally caught, he was acquitted on a technicality. The parents on Elm Street weren't too happy about that. They didn't like the idea of a child killer living on the block, you know? So they all agreed to take care of him themselves. One night, they burned him alive. But … he wasn't gone." She wiped a few stray tears and sniffled before continuing. "Freddy came back in the nightmares of his killers' children … the Elm Street children he'd missed. And when he killed them in their dreams … they died in their sleep."

Dan cleared his throat and said hesitantly, "Well, um, look, you know, *everybody* has nightmares, but I—"

She looked at him over her shoulder. "You don't know what nightmares are. In *these* dreams, you play by Freddy's rules. Wake up or *die.* Freddy doesn't like to let anyone get away. We did once … Kincaid and Joey and I. That's why Freddy's back. And *that"*—she pointed out the window as Rick slowed to a stop in front of a large rundown house with peeling paint and boarded windows—"is his house."

They all got out of the car and looked at the house from the sidewalk.

"Creepy house," Dan said.

"It's not just any house," Kristen replied, visibly shaken. "It's his *home.* That's where Kincaid and Joey and I fought him. There were others too … all people I'd met in … well, a place I stayed in once."

Alice had heard rumors that Kristen had stayed in a mental hospital for a while a couple years back. She never knew if it was true and

thought it impolite to ask. Maybe she *had;* maybe that's the place she was referring to … and maybe, just *maybe,* it was about time for her to go back for a while. Then again … maybe not.

"We were the only ones to get out alive," Kristen said. "We watched him burn … we thought he was gone, but … Freddy never seems to go away … not for good. Now he's back. He got them, and I'm next. He's come for me."

Rick put his arm around her and gave her a squeeze. "C'mon, babe, let go of it. You're safe." He kissed her cheek and said, "Dan and I are gonna go look around a little."

They went up the walk and wandered around the house.

" 'Now I lay me down to sleep …' " Alice whispered.

"What?"

"The dream master. I think I remember the rhyme. 'Now I lay me down to sleep … the master of dreams my soul to keep …' Sorry, I forget the rest. But it's like the prayer, you know?"

"That's okay. I don't *have* a prayer."

A horn honked and they turned to see Kristen's mother pulling up to the curb. She rolled down the window and shouted, "Kristen! Get the *hell* away from that *house!* Now! *Andele!"*

Rick hurried to Kristen's side and whispered, "You don't have to go if you don't want to. I'll stay with you."

"No. I should." She turned and forced a smile for Alice. The worry knitting her brow made her look older, haggard.

Alice felt a pang of pity for her friend and leaned forward to whisper in her ear. "What you said about pulling people into your dreams? Well, if you ever need help … think of me. I'll come."

There were tears in Kristen's eyes as she walked away.

Rick watched her drive away, then said, "Well, what do you say we split."

They started for Rick's car when something on the ground caught Alice's eye. It was a colorful chalk drawing of the Krueger house, obviously drawn by a child. It looked faded, a little smeared, but the colors were still surprisingly bright.

"C'mon, Alice, let's go," Rick called.

She walked a few steps, then stopped. She'd seen something in the window of the chalk house … a figure … She turned to look again, but —

—the drawing was gone, the sidewalk clean.

Daydreaming again, she thought, getting into the car.

Chapter 6

Kristen was not hungry, but to make dinner even *more* unbearable, her mother was staring at her from across the dining room table. She nibbled a bit of chicken, but mostly just prodded her food with her fork, barely able to keep her eyes open. She'd felt exhausted since she got home.

"Something the matter with the cuisine?" her mother asked.

Kristen said nothing for a moment, then made no attempt to hide her mood. "Well, I'll tell you, Mom, when two of *your* friends die the same day, you let me know what it does to *your* appetite."

She relaxed a little, sighed.

Kristen sipped her lemonade; it tasted a little bitter, but it was cold and felt good doing down.

"You're just tired, Kristen. Don't think I haven't noticed you aren't sleeping. That's got to stop, you know."

She couldn't take any more. "Well, I'm sorry if I'm not very good company," Kristen said, standing, but—

—the room tilted, swayed, and she fell back into her chair, holding her head. Her eyes felt heavy, swollen, and her tongue seemed thick. She wanted to sleep but couldn't … *wouldn't.*

She straightened up in her chair, lifted her glass of lemonade to take another drink, and—

—it hit her. The lemonade's bitterness—her sudden drowsiness …

"Oh, God," she breathed. "What did you do?" She turned to her mother, who averted her eyes, and shouted again, *"What did you do?"*

"It'll ease your anxiety."

"What?"

"You need to *sleep,* Kristen."

She dropped the glass; it shattered and lemonade splashed everywhere as Kristen reached for her mother's purse on the corner of the table. Her mother grabbed for it, but Kristen was faster. She turned it over and spilled its contents in a heap.

A bottle of sleeping pills popped open and they skittered over the tabletop.

"Oh … my … *Gaaawwwd!"* Kristen screamed, stumbling away from the table.

"I'm *sorry,* honey, but—"

"Sorry?" Kristen faced her, leaning weakly against the wall. "Sorry that you and your tennis pals torched this pervert so he could chase me in my *dreams?* In case you haven't noticed, Mother, it's *his* fucking banquet, and *I'm* the last *course!"*

"Kristen," she snapped, pounding the table. "We went over this in therapy. You dealt with all of this in the hospital. It's *over!"*

"Mother … you've just murdered me. Take *that* to your fucking *therapy."* Ignoring her mother's shouts, Kristen staggered up the stairs, mumbling, *hissing,* to herself: "Nooo … can't end like thisss … I won't let it … *nooo …"*

In her room she locked the door and leaned against it, remembering what Alice had said.

… think of me … I'll come … think of me … I'll come …

Kristen stumbled toward the telephone on the nightstand but fell with her arms outstretched, just a few feet short. The pills were pulling her under like a deadly riptide sucking her away from a safe white beach, dragging her into an ocean of unconsciousness. Mustering all her strength, she called, "Allliiicce … Al … iccce …" But the name was only a breath. She rolled on her back, murmuring, "… fun … dream someplace fun … someplace fun …"

Her leaden eyes finally closed and she slipped into a heavy blackness that was interrupted only by—

—the sound of water lapping against a shore.

Kristen opened her eyes and looked up at a bright blue sky. Sitting up, she found she was wearing a bathing suit and lying on a towel. A breeze whispered through palm trees all around her and sunlight glimmered on a broad body of water. A few yards away a little girl knelt on the shore building a sand castle. It was large and detailed, rather elaborate for a girl so small. The girl smiled and waved, Kristen waved back and laid back on her towel. But she frowned …

It wasn't a sand *castle.* It was a *house.*

It was *his* house.

Kristen sat up quickly but the little girl was gone. She looked all around, but she was alone on the beach. Only the castle—*house,* Kristen corrected herself—remained on the shore. Except …

Something in the water caught Kristen's attention. A flash of light, a ripple of movement …

She sat up straighter and squinted, following the small moving object. It almost looked like a … yes, a *shark's* fin. Leaning forward, Kristen saw it glint again, like metal, as it cut through the water, zigzagging a few times, then—

—it took a sharp turn and increased its speed, heading straight for the beach. As it drew nearer it became more detailed, and Kristen could see that—

—it *was* made of metal, and it was *not* a shark's fin. Seconds before it reached the beach Kristen realized, with a bone-deep chill, that the object was four razor-sharp blades in ascending height slicing through the water toward her, closer … closer … until—

—they hit the shore and kicked up a burst of sand as they cut through the ground with ease, heading straight for the sand castle, straight for Kristen, until—

—it hit the sand castle and an explosion sent a cloud of sand into the air and sent Kristen scrambling backward, trying to get to her feet, but she froze when she saw—

—a figure in the slowly clearing mist of scattered sand …

Freddy.

She was paralyzed with fear as he walked toward her, his grin filled with promises of pain and torture. When she was finally able to stand —

—the sand beneath her weakened suddenly and her bare feet sank into the ground. She was buried to her knees by the time she looked down at the undulating ground beneath her. She was not simply sinking … the sand was *sucking* her down, and—

—Freddy was coming closer.

"No!" Kristen shouted, struggling uselessly as she was sucked deeper, as the sand rose to her waist … her breasts …

Freddy stood beside her, blanketing her with his shadow, and grinned. He lifted his foot, held it above her, then lowered it slowly until it was touching the top of her head. He pushed and—

—Kristen fell through the sand into nothingness, bracing herself for a fall. When nothing happened, she opened her eyes, found herself on her hands and knees in a dimly-lighted room. An *upside-down* room.

No, she thought, feeling dizzy, *the room isn't upside down … I'm on the ceiling!*

She defied gravity, clinging to the ceiling of Freddy's living room like a fly. Quickly gaining her bearings, Kristen crawled on all fours, slowly and carefully, across the ceiling to the wall. Expecting to fall, she continued down the wall, cutting diagonally toward a door. She reached down, turned the knob, and threw herself through the doorway and landed—

—in the boiler room.

"Please, God, *no!"* she screamed.

The room glowed a fiery red and steam hissed from between the

pipes. She stood and looked around her and stiffened when she saw Freddy standing in front of the open boiler across from her; deadly flames danced inside the boiler behind him.

He grinned, chuckled, and swiped the air with his razors.

Rage bubbled inside Kristen and she cried defiantly, “We beat you *before!”* Summoning the power that had saved her in dreams past, she rushed toward him, jumped into the air, flipped smoothly and slammed her feet into his chest, then rolled away.

Freddy sprawled to the floor but got up quickly, his grin replaced by an angry scowl. “But you’re all alone now,” he growled, advancing toward her. “The laaaast Elm Street *brat.* Why don’t you call in one of your *friends?”*

“Never!” she shouted, determined not to be responsible for any more deaths.

Moving closer, Freddy screeched his blades down a pipe and sneered, “Why don’t you reach out and *touch* someone?” Closer still … “Don’t you want some *help,* Kristen?”

Yes, she thought, *I don’t want to be alone, I don’t …*

“No!” she cried, backing away from him. “I won’t do it!”

… *think of me … I’ll come,* Alice had said … *think of me … I’ll come* …

“No!” she shouted again as Freddy drew close enough for her to see the individual burn scars on his ravaged face and the rust—or dried blood—on his blades.

“You want to, Kristen,” he hissed.

Her back pressed against a wall of pipes.

“I *knoowww* you want to.”

She could smell his breath, and the blades were reaching toward her face, her throat, and—

—she screamed, *“Aaaaliiice!”*

There was a clatter above them and Alice’s limp body fell, landing on top of Freddy and flattening him to the floor. Alice immediately began crawling, her face wide with panic and confusion. Kristen clutched Alice’s arms and dragged her away from Freddy, helped her to her feet.

“I’m sorry!” Kristen shouted. “Go back! Get out!” She slapped her confused friend hard in the face. “Wake up and *get out of here!”*

Alice looked around her, eyes widening in horror, until she saw Freddy. She looked like she wanted to scream but was too scared.

He stood a few yards away and laughed, “How sweet. Fresh meat …”

He rushed forward, reaching for Alice, but—

—Kristen stepped between them, shouting, “Leave her alone!” and —

—Freddy closed his fist around Kristen’s shirt, lifted her from the floor and threw her into the air.

She tossed head over heels, arms and legs flailing and, before she could scream—

—Kristen landed in the flaming boiler. Her skin began to hiss immediately, glistening in the intense heat, then turning a charcoal black as it bubbled; her hair crackled as it burned, and her face felt as if it were melting from her skull as she looked out of the flames and screamed helplessly at Freddy as—

—he ripped open his shirt to reveal his mangled flesh beneath and the tortured faces of his young victims, their mouths yawning in silent screams, eyes bulging in pain, and Freddy shouted into the fire: “Now you’re one of my chilll-drennn!” He spun around and faced Alice, who released a shrill scream when she saw the writhing faces beneath his shirt. He moved toward her and—

—Kristen clung to her last remaining thoughts as her body disintegrated rapidly. She was determined to keep Freddy from Alice and, calling upon her dream strength, extended a charred arm and shrieked as—

—a bolt of electric-blue energy shot from her fist and hit Freddy square in the back, making him dance like a marionette for a moment, but the damage was short-lived. Freddy arched his back and seemed to swell, to pulsate, as if feeding on the energy. Then, releasing an echoing laugh, he advanced on Alice, who backed away in paralyzed terror.

Her voice a dying gurgle, Kristen screamed, “Alice! You’ll need my power!” and shot another bolt from the furnace aimed straight at Alice. It splashed against her chest in a flurry of sparks and—

—Alice lost her breath for a moment, clenched her eyes shut and stiffened, feeling as if she were being electrocuted. The soothing blue energy coursed through her body like a revitalizing drug, and Alice opened her eyes as—

—Kristen’s smoldering face took shape in Freddy’s chest, emerging among the other faces of lost victims, her skin bubbling, mouth gaping …

Freddy was less than three feet away when he lifted his arm and swung the deadly blades through the air and—

—Alice sat up in bed, screaming, clutching the sweat-soaked sheets. For a moment she could still feel the sizzling energy coursing through her body, and her throat was sore from breathing smoke. As she regained her bearings, breasts heaving, she noticed something unfamiliar on her mirror across the room. A postcard was tucked beneath the mirror's frame. She got out of bed, crossed the room, plucked the card from the frame and gasped.

In the picture, Freddy grinned as he held a terrified Kristen in his arms. Alice read the words, written in blocky red letters, aloud:

" 'Greetings from Hell … wish you were here …' "

The card began to blacken and shrivel and flames licked the paper in Alice's hand. She dropped it, gasping, and it disintegrated before it hit the floor.

Alice looked at the mass of pictures on her mirror and saw her eyes reflected in the small rectangular space left by the postcard. Her eyes were different, more intense somehow. They had changed …

Rick burst into the room and gasped, "Alice! You okay? I heard you —"

She faced him and cried, "We've gotta get to Kristen's house!"

They ran most of the way and saw the smoke half a block away. It billowed from Kristen's bedroom window.

Rick kicked in the living room's plate-glass window and tore aside the curtains. Alice followed him inside. As they started up the stairs they heard Mrs. Parker screaming in the hall. They found her standing in the smoky doorway of Kristen's room. Rick pulled her away and Alice stepped up to the door.

It was too late. The room was gone. Flames climbed the walls and poured across the ceiling.

All she could see of Kristen was a blackened arm that, in an instant, was swallowed by the fire …

Chapter 7

Three days later, when Alice got home from the funeral, she went into the family room and fished through the row of videotapes in the cabinet until she found the one she wanted. She slipped it into the VCR, turned on the television, and watched as Kristen appeared on the screen, laughing, as Rick held her down on a patch of grass and tickled her.

"Stop! Stop!" Kristen shrieked.

The images and voices that followed—Kristen and Rick playing, Debbie razzing Sheila about studying so much, Sheila razzing Debbie about working out so much—made Alice feel better. Returning from the funeral, she'd been overwhelmed by a need to see Kristen, hear her … be close to her.

Alice heard Rick come into the family room but did not look up; she couldn't take her eyes from the screen, as if she were *drawn* to Kristen's image.

"Alice," Rick whispered, sitting beside her on the sofa, "what're you doing?"

"I don't know," she shrugged. "I guess it … makes me feel better." She smiled at the screen. "You made her so happy then, Rick. Remember?"

"Yeah." He sighed heavily. "Why didn't I stay with her that night?"

"It wouldn't have made any difference."

"Sure it would've."

Alice faced him. "No, it *wouldn't* have. I saw it happen in my *dream,* Rick. There was this man, this *horrible* man, and—"

"Oh, *who?* Freddy?" He held up his hand. "Look, I've had *enough* of Freddy, okay? I heard it all from Kristen and I *don't* wanna *hear* any *more!* So just *stop* it." He turned away from her.

Alice didn't stop; she grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back around, saying urgently. "I could *smell* the *smoke,* Rick. I could feel the heat from the *fire!* I *watched* her *burn!"*

He covered his face with his hands and growled, "Stop it! Just … *stop!* Kristen wasn't crazy and neither are *you,* so why are you acting this way?" Pulling his hands away, Alice saw that he was about to cry. "Why, Alice?" he whispered.

"I … don't know, Rick. Really, I just feel so …" She tried to choose

her words carefully. He was already beginning to think she might be losing it, and she didn't want that; she needed his help. "I feel so different. Something happened in the dream, I think. I can't think of anything but Kristen, which is normal, I guess … but this is *different.* I changed in my dream. She … *did* something to me. Now it's like part of her is with me all the time. *Inside* me. I think I even *look* different. Don't I? Don't you think so?"

He looked at her silently, shaking his head.

"Rick?"

He got up and left the room.

The next day, studying her reflection in the girls' restroom mirror, Alice was *certain* she had changed. Her face was more … defined, perhaps; her features seemed to stand out more and her eyes seemed brighter, in spite of the fact that she'd been up all night and felt tired enough to sleep standing up.

Someone had left a pack of Marlboros by the sink, and Alice shook one out, took matches from her purse and lit up, taking a puff. She burst into a fit of coughs and stared at the burning cigarette, sputtering, "I don't smoke!"

But Kristen did, she thought, dropping the cigarette in the sink.

"Kristen," she whispered, "what did you *do* to me?"

Sheila came in, stood at the faucet beside Alice, and splashed cold water on her face. "I am dead on my feet," she said exhaustedly as she dried off with a paper towel.

"We have matching luggage," Alice said, startling herself. They were Kristen's words.

"What?"

"You've been up all night?"

"That obvious, huh?"

Alice brightened with hope. "Then you saw him *too?"*

"Saw who? I didn't see anybody. I was up all night cramming for this physics test. And I was putting this little baby together." She opened her book bag and removed a gadget that looked like an electric shaver with a joy buzzer on the end. "You know how Debbie's afraid of bugs? I made this for her. Ultra-high sound waves. Makes 'em run, screaming their antennae off." She frowned at Alice and asked, "Hey, you okay?"

"Yeah. Fine." She knew she didn't sound too convincing.

"Well, good luck on the test," Sheila said, gathering her things. "See you in class."

Once the physics test had begun, Mrs. Geary's classroom became silent as a tomb. It was the kind of silence that invited sleep, and Alice's vision blurred with exhaustion. Sheila was seated in front of her and already busy writing answers. Alice's eyes grew heavy and her head bowed as she began to doze, the room's silence and warmth easing her into a comfortable sleep, until—

—Sheila gasped and Alice snapped alert, leaning forward in her desk to see what was wrong.

Sheila was sitting stiffly, staring at her test paper with her pen poised to write as—

—the preprinted equations danced over the page like tiny acrobats, tumbling over one another, spinning and twirling …

The numbers stopped and letters were quickly scrawled on the paper with an invisible pen:

LEARNING IS FUN
WITH FREDDY

I'm asleep, Alice thought. *Gotta wake up … wake up … gotta—*

Alice heard something dripping and looked over Sheila's shoulder again to see that—

—blood was dripping from the point of Sheila's pen and splattering onto the paper.

"School's out," a familiar voice growled.

Alice looked to the front and saw Freddy seated at Mrs. Geary's desk, peeling an apple with one of the blades on his right hand. He grinned at Sheila, tossed the apple aside and stood.

"No!" Alice cried, turning to get out of her seat, but a rusty metal bar slammed into place across her lap, trapping her behind the small desk as Freddy walked toward Sheila. "No! Help! Somebody *help!"*

Alice looked around, but the other students were obliviously involved in their tests as—

—Freddy stood before Sheila, who was trembling like a kitten, and said, "All work and no play makes Sheila a *very* dull girl." He leaned forward, plucked her glasses off and flicked his tongue inches from her mouth, then asked, "Wanna suck *face?"*

Sheila screamed as Freddy grabbed her collar, pulled her out of her seat and pressed his mouth over hers, silencing her cry.

Alice shouted frantically for help but got no response while—

—Freddy's scarred cheeks pulled inward as he began to suck, and—

—Sheila's eyes widened impossibly and bulged from their sockets, threatening to pop out as veins began to stand out on her forehead

and neck and—

—her face and hands began to shrivel and her struggles to weaken as her skull seemed to deflate with a soft moist sound and her rib cage, pressed hard against her shirt, imploded with a horrible thick *crrrack!*

"Somebody please … help," Alice said, but quietly this time, because she knew Sheila was lost. The girl's bulbous eyes dropped out of their sockets and dangled by bloody cords as her skin shriveled to a leathery husk and—

—Freddy slammed her down into her desk and laughed. "You *flunk.*" Then he turned to Alice, reached out and stroked her cheek carefully with one of his blades as he whispered, almost lovingly, "Thank you," and—

—Freddy was suddenly gone and the classroom was alive with panic as Sheila lay across the top of her desk, clutching her breasts and gasping desperately for air.

Quickly, Alice got up, fumbled the inhalator from Sheila's book bag and tried to force it into Sheila's writhing mouth, but—

—Sheila's gasps stopped, her head dropped to the side and her body became limp on the desk.

The room was silent. Alice stood straight and looked around at the shocked students.

"Call an ambulance," somebody said as Debbie, Dan, and Rick gathered around Alice.

Alice spotted the bug-killing device Sheila had made for Debbie—it had fallen out of Sheila's book bag—and bent down and picked it up.

"Didn't you see him?" Alice asked tremulously. "He was here. He *did* this! I *saw* him!" Rick took her arm and gently coaxed her out of the room as Alice rambled on and on: "He did this … I watched it … I *saw* it …"

After all the students had been dismissed for the day, Rick, Alice, Debbie, and Dan stood in front of the school as the ambulance drove slowly out of the parking lot carrying Sheila's corpse. Rick tried unsuccessfully to calm Alice, but he no longer snapped at her like before. Instead, he found himself trying to ignore her talk about Freddy; it was no longer annoying … it was scary.

"Asthma attack my ass," Debbie mumbled, fighting tears. "What seventeen-year-old has a fatal asthma attack?"

"I *told* you," Alice insisted, "it was *Freddy.*"

“Enough of that crap!” Debbie snapped.

“I saw it, I *told* you! It was my dream. I … I brought Sheila in …” She turned to Rick slowly, her face darkening with a horrible realization. “Oh, God, I brought her into my dream … like Kristen did with *me.* I *gave* her to Freddy! *And now she’s dead!”* she hissed, backing away. Sobbing, she turned and ran away from them.

Rick’s insides ached as he heard his sister cry.

“Rick,” Dan said, “I think Kristen’s story is getting to your sister.”

In a flash of anger, Rick barked, *“Look,* Dan, I’m not so sure it’s a *story* anymore, okay?”

“You mean … you *believe* it?”

“Well, look at us. We’re dropping like *flies* around here.” Rick looked at Debbie and could see in her eyes the same fear he felt. Then he turned and ran after Alice …

That night Alice sat down at her vanity and took from the mirror a picture of herself and Sheila, both laughing … happy …

Looking up at the mirror, she saw that still more of her reflection had been exposed by removing the picture. She touched her face in disbelief.

She looked prettier … stronger …

Chapter 8

A few nights after Sheila's funeral, Dan entered the Crave Inn and saw Alice behind the register. He'd come to pick up his call-in order to take to the drive-in; Brenda McCarsky, captain of the cheerleader team, was waiting for him in his pickup. She could wait …

"Hey, Alice, how you doing?" he asked, and she smiled wearily. "Haven't seen you around lately."

"I've been working double shifts."

"Extra money, huh?"

"You know why, Dan. You just don't believe."

"No offense, Alice, really, it's just … kind of hard to swallow."

"The story is, but you can't argue with four deaths." Tears welled up in her eyes. "I don't know what to do. I can't stop it. Why doesn't he just *kill* me?"

On impulse, Dan reached over the counter and took her hand. "How long have you been awake?"

"Three days."

In spite of that fact, she looked well-rested and strong … very pretty, in fact, not as plain as before. Something about her was different.

"Don't you understand," she whispered, "every time I sleep, someone might die."

"All right, Alice, let's assume this whole thing is true. Why is Freddy all of a sudden after you?"

She chewed her lower lip a moment, then said, "Kristen was the last child left of the people who killed Freddy. Maybe Freddy can't get to new kids without someone like me. Someone to bring them to him. Like *me.*"

The bell over the door clanged and Brenda stuck her head in and called, "Danny, we're gonna be late for the drive-in!"

He rolled his eyes. "Be right there." Alice got his order for him and, as he paid, Dan said, "Look, if there's anything I can do …"

"Thanks," she said, smiling.

Dan suddenly lost interest in his date with Brenda McCarsky, but he turned and left anyway.

The next day, as everyone else suited up for practice in the locker room, Rick went to a stall, locked the door, and sat on the toilet. He needed to be alone for a moment. The deaths had created a lot of tension—just moments before, Dan had nearly beaten up Buddy Milton for saying Alice was a "basket case'—but Rick had the added pressure of staying up every night with Alice. He didn't know how she managed to do it; he was ready to collapse.

He put his head in his hands, elbows on his knees, and relaxed.

Just for a minute or two, he thought.

But two minutes became five … and ten … and Rick began to doze as—

—Alice struggled to stay awake in Miss Kopitsky's history class. The aging woman lectured in her dry monotone voice, and Alice's head drooped forward heavily. Her eyes closed as she rested her head on her desktop.

Just for a little while, she thought. But when she was jarred from her rest—

—Alice realized she was in a darkened locker room facing a row of stalls. Half a dozen uniformed cheerleaders hurried into the room, waving their pom-poms and giggling … but Alice was *certain* it wasn't the girls' locker room. The cheerleaders went to the stall on the end and opened the door, crowding inside.

Moving forward, Alice peered into the stall and saw—

—Rick sitting on the toilet with a startled look on his face. She was relieved to see him, and pushed her way into the crowded stall. "Rick?" she said. "What's happening, Rick? Why are we—"

The stall door slammed shut and the entire stall rumbled and jerked like … like an *elevator.*

Soft syrupy Muzak began to play from overhead … an elevator-music version of "Taps."

They *were* in an elevator! The giggling cheerleaders seemed not to notice; they lavished Rick with kisses, fondling and stroking him, until —

—the elevator jerked to a halt and the door slid open. Alice moved toward Rick, but the cheerleaders headed out of the elevator, pushing her back with them.

"No!" she shouted, fighting them unsuccessfully. "No! Rick! *Rick!*"

Once she was outside the elevator, the door slid shut with an ominous rumble and she threw herself onto it, prying at it with her

fingers, heaving and pulling until—

—the door slid open and Rick smiled at her, stepped toward her, but—

—the floor trembled, cracked and collapsed beneath him, its pieces falling silently down a black bottomless shaft as—

—Rick grabbed the railing on the wall and dangled over the pit, his legs kicking as he made small panicky sounds in his throat.

"Riiick!" Alice screamed, reaching for him.

"Going down," a voice said from above, and Kristen looked up to see Freddy grinning at them through the elevator's gridless vent. "Chain saws, lingerie, butcher knives … *infinity!"* Freddy threw back his head and laughed uproariously as—

—the railing began to glow a soft red and Rick's hands began to smoke. As the railing grew rapidly hotter, Rick's palms sizzled and gave off a sickly smell and he screamed, "Alice! Huh-help me! Help me, please, God, help *meeeee …"*

His hands let go and he disappeared into the blackness, his voice fading with him.

Alice screamed and looked up at Freddy, who waved to her with his knives.

"Thank you," he whispered again as—

—Alice awoke at her desk with a jolt, startling her classmates and Miss Kopitsky. When she realized what had just happened, Alice pounded the desk with her fist and screamed, *"Nooooo!"* She dashed from the room, ran down the hall and across campus to the gymnasium, then into the boys' locker room.

Coach Williamson ran toward her, shouting, "Hey, young lady, whatta you think you're—"

She dodged, ran around him and found the stalls, opening the one on the end.

Rick lay limp, sprawled facedown over the toilet.

Alice dropped to her knees and released a long, ragged scream …

Chapter 9

Squinting in the glare of the sun, Alice stared at her brother's casket as the minister droned monotonously. A large crowd was gathered around the gravesite, mostly teenagers; sniffles and an occasional sob broke the cemetery's stillness.

Alice felt a disturbing numbness. She saw no end to the deaths, and her mind seemed to be blocking off any more tears or pain. She stared at the casket, stared … and stared … and … and—

—the lid swung open and Rick sat up, smiling. "This is great, huh?" he laughed. "They think I'm dead! *I love it!" He got out of the casket and walked over to her, touching her cheek. "Hey, you know I wouldn't leave you all alone, Alice. This was just to fool ol' Freddy!"*

A tear in her eye, Alice shook her head and whispered, "No … no more daydreams …"

"What are we going to do, Alice?"

Debbie's voice startled her from the daydream. The minister had finished and the crowd was breaking up. It seemed odd to see Debbie crying; she was so *tough.*

"We're going to stop daydreaming," Alice said, "and take that son of a bitch out."

"What! God, Alice, what're you talking about? I'm *sick* of this shit. Who's *next,* huh? Can you tell me that?"

Alice took her arm and led her away from the open grave. Dan followed them. *"You'll* be next if you don't get a grip on yourself. Understand? You're doing to have to do more than bench presses this time. We have to get *smart.* Smarter than Freddy. We're gonna *get him."*

Debbie seemed to calm down; she even seemed to be taking Alice seriously.

"Let me help," Dan said. "I'm not saying I don't believe you, but … well, maybe we should get help from someone else."

"Oh, sure," Debbie snapped, "let's trade death by Freddy for life in a rubber room."

"She's right," Alice agreed. "Other people—especially adults—won't see it."

"Well … it couldn't hurt," Dan tried again.

Debbie said, "Look, it'd be a waste of time. We should start thinking about how we're gonna kick Freddy's *ass.*"

"That's right!" Alice exclaimed. "And remember—mind over matter." Alice heard her father calling for her and backed away from her friends. "Look, I'll see you guys later, okay?" She headed across the cemetery toward her father. He was already drunk.

Dan watched her go.

" 'Mind over matter,' " Debbie said quietly. "Sheila said that to me once. I don't get it. Every day, it's like Alice is someone different."

"No," Dan whispered. "It's after every death."

"Do you really wanna tell someone, Dan? About Freddy, I mean?"

"Yeah. And I know just the guy …"

The next day Dan and Debbie went to see Mr. Bryson, their English literature teacher. Dan knew that Bryson taught a college night class in mythology and had a background in philosophy. Even better, he was a veteran of the sixties and, as Dan and Debbie stood in Bryson's office, Dan noticed a couple of Woodstock posters on the wall. They'd been talking with him for about ten minutes, asking questions about dreams, and now Bryson sat at his desk stroking his chin thoughtfully.

"Well," Bryson said, "every society, dating back to the ancients, has had theories regarding dreams—what they mean, how to control them."

"Control them?" Dan asked.

"Yes. Aristotle believed that during sleep your soul roams free. What it sees are dreams. Skilled dreamers control what they see."

"Where do the souls go?"

"There's supposed to be two gates your soul can enter, one a positive dream gate, the other a negative. The dream master guards the positive gate. Protects its sleeping host."

"Is there a guard for the negative gate?" Debbie asked.

"There were never any theories about that."

Dan hesitated a moment, then said, "What if we told you about a guy, a … a demon who lived in dreams and could kill you in your sleep?"

Bryson raised his eyebrows curiously. "Sounds a bit radical but, yes, it could fit the theory."

"Great," Dan said enthusiastically. "Because it's true. There is a guy

—"

"His name's Freddy," Debbie added.

Bryson looked at them suspiciously. "Freddy?"

"Yeah," Dan said, becoming animated, "he lives in your dreams and *kills* you. Now … how do we stop him?"

Bryson stood, holding up his hands. "Whoa, whoa, slow down, wait a minute. Hey, Aristotle was writing *fiction,* okay? I mean, none of this is *real."*

Debbie glared at him, getting angry. "So what are you saying? That we're full of it?"

"No, not at all. Just … well, there have been a lot of deaths around here lately, and … I know how stress can get to you kids. Tell you what." He removed a business card from his pocket and offered it to Debbie. "This is a guy who raps to young people, really understands. Why don't you give him a try?"

Debbie slapped the card out of Bryson's hand and spat, *"Save* it. Save all your *bullshit!"* She turned to Dan. "Alice was right. Let's go."

Bryson followed them into the hall, calling, "No, wait! You should see this guy. Tell him about Freddy. And remember, you guys, just say *no."*

Alice was waiting for them at the foot of the hall stairs.

"Satisfied?" she asked.

"I knew it'd be a waste of time," Debbie grumbled.

Dan was disappointed; he shook his head and said, "I don't get it. He's from the *sixties.* I thought those people believed *anything."*

"Look," Alice said, "we have to keep thinking. Use our heads and stay sharp. Starting tonight, we sleep in shifts."

"Sooner or later, we're gonna conk out," Dan warned.

"No, we're *not,"* Alice snapped. "We're gonna get ready. For Freddy."

Debbie unclasped a wicked blank leather bracelet with silver studs from her wrist and handed it to Alice. "A bad-luck charm," she smirked. "Brings bad luck to the creep you flatten with it."

Alice smiled gratefully, then turned to Dan.

He felt like a failure; he'd been so sure Bryson would help. But when Alice took his hand, he knew it didn't matter. They would help each other.

That night Alice got Rick's nun-chucks and oriental-style bandanna from the garage and took them to her room, where she hung the bandanna beside the mirror above Sheila's bug-killing gadget. She put

Debbie’s studded bracelet on the vanity table, then spotted a picture of herself and Rick on the mirror. She pulled it off the glass, studied it a moment, then looked at her reflection in the mirror. She could see more of herself, and she had changed even more.

She thought she was quite attractive now … there was a new surety and strength in her eyes.

Alice took the nun-chucks to the middle of the room and tried some of the moves she’d seen Rick go through in the garage. She was slow and clumsy at first, but in mere minutes her arms began to move rapidly and the nun-chucks sliced the air with a whining hum, whipping around her, slapping from one hand to another, the chain clinking and clicking …

She stopped suddenly, realizing that what she’d just done was better than anything she’d ever seen Rick do … and he *practiced.*

Alice turned to her reflection again and whispered, “What’s happening to me?”

Chapter 10

Dan had been pacing in front of the Crave Inn for forty-five minutes, waiting for Alice. That afternoon they had agreed to meet there, but she had not shown up and the Crave Inn had already closed. He looked up and down the dark, deserted street as he walked to his truck. The small, friendly town his family had moved to only months ago now seemed sinister and threatening. He got into his truck and sat behind the wheel.

"All the towns in America," he muttered, *"I* had to move to the Bermuda Triangle." He folded his arms with a sigh and leaned his head against the back window. He felt sleepy …

Alice slammed her bedroom door, stomped to her bed and sat on the edge. She couldn't meet with Dan because her father wouldn't let her leave the house.

"I lost Rick because I didn't watch him," he'd slurred, standing in front of the door. "I don't wanna lose you. Honey … we're all we have …"

She laid back on her bed, her muscles aching from lack of sleep, and closed her eyes.

Just for a few minutes, she thought, relaxing until—

—she snapped awake, thinking, *Rick's bedroom window!*

She hurried down the hall to Rick's room, opened the window and crawled out, shimmying down the tree. Once on the ground, she headed down the street toward town.

In a few minutes she was standing in front of the Crave Inn, but Dan was nowhere to be found. She searched the intersecting streets for his truck but it wasn't there. A couple blocks down one of the streets, however, she saw—

—a movie theater. The marquee read: MIDNIGHT SHOW – REEFER MADNESS.

Not wanting to go home to her drunken father, Alice walked to the theater, paid admission at the box office, bought some popcorn and a Pepsi at the refreshment stand, and went into the auditorium and found a seat.

The black and white images on the screen cast a gray glow onto the

blank faces in the audience as they stared at the movie, chewing their popcorn and Milk Duds.

On the screen a man was playing the piano and laughing maniacally as a man and woman looked on.

Alice watched, trying to get into the film as she ate her popcorn, when suddenly—

—the colorless picture changed to a filthy, rundown urban street. A howling wind blew crumpled newspapers down the sidewalk in front of a dilapidated building with a sign over the door that read, THE CRAVE INN. Alice's hand froze halfway to her mouth and she gaped at the screen. It was the diner in which she worked, but much older and in much worse shape … as if she were looking at the Crave Inn twenty or thirty years in the future.

A dry chill wind began to blow through the theater, as if the screen had opened up and the wind in the movie were blowing through the auditorium.

On screen the wind grew stronger, pounding the already battered diner, howling around the theater in a swirl until—

—Alice's carton of popcorn flew from her hand and scattered everywhere and her hair slapped her face as it was blown around, and then—

—the wind seemed to change direction, blowing back *into* the screen as it grew more forceful, until—

—the screen was sucking air *out* of the auditorium, like a gigantic vacuum cleaner. The suction was strong enough to slurp Alice's Pepsi out of its cup and into the screen, strong enough to rip the front-row seats from their bolts and down the black and white street in the film, and the wind grew stronger still, until—

—Alice screamed as she was sucked from her seat and through the air, straight into the screen, where—

—she tumbled painlessly onto the sidewalk.

Gasping for air, she stood up and looked around. Her surroundings were black and white, completely without color, just as they'd been in the movie. The wind continued to whip around her.

She opened the door beneath the Crave Inn's faded broken sign and walked into the diner, where color was immediately restored. Turning to close the door, she looked outside to see—

—the audience on the other side of the screen, oblivious to everything that had happened. They crunched popcorn and sucked soft drinks through straws, watching her intently. And seated in the fifth row, she saw *herself,* head slumped to one side as she slept.

"No," she whimpered. "Wake up … wake … *up!*"

The door slammed shut with a *bang;* Freddy stood behind it, grinning.

Alice screamed and stumbled backward, flopping into a counter seat, where the waitress droned, "What'll it be, sweety?"

It was her … *Alice* … fat and old, with gray hair, wrinkled pasty skin, and empty eyes. Alice stared at herself—her *future* self—in horror.

"Well, what'll it *be?"* the waitress asked impatiently. "I don't wanna be here forever, y'know."

"The usual," Freddy said, taking the seat beside Alice. He turned to her, and she could smell his foul breath as he said, "If the food don't kill ya, the service *will."*

The waitress slapped a large pizza onto the counter and shuffled away.

But it was no ordinary pizza.

What looked, at first, like meatballs, were actually marble-sized heads with vivid faces. They were the faces of Freddy's victims—Kincaid and Joey, Kristen, Sheila and Rick, and many others—all writhing in the melted cheese and screaming up at Alice in tiny insectlike voices.

"My favorite," Freddy hissed, lifting the pizza from the counter. "Cheese and carnage pizza!" He pointed a deadly blade at the pizza and began to chant, "Eenie-meenie-minie-*moe!"*

Alice screamed, *"Rick!"* when she saw that the blade pointed at a tiny version of her brother's head.

"Alice!" Rick cried. "Free us, Alice! *Freeeee uussss!"*

Freddy stabbed the blade into Rick's forehead and plucked him from the mass of melted cheese, holding the head up before him. "I *looove* soul food!" Then he popped the head into his mouth and bit down with a wet, sickening crunch, chewing enthusiastically.

"No!" Alice sobbed. "Nuh-nuh-*nooooo!"*

"Yessss," Freddy hissed, holding her face in his hands. "More, Alice. Bring me *more."* He spun around suddenly and the diner's door flew open again. Now, instead of the theater audience, there was a room on the other side.

It was a room Alice recognized; she'd been there before. It was Debbie's attic, filled with exercise equipment. Debbie lay on her weight bench; her arms dangled at her sides as she sighed wearily and closed her eyes.

Freddy leaned toward Alice's ear and whispered, "She's getting sleeepyyy."

"No," Alice whimpered, "please don't hurt her. No more … please

stop."

Freddy sneered. "Your shift is *over!*"

He clanged his blades together and—

—Alice sat up in bed and looked around her darkened bedroom, cursing herself for falling asleep.

She hopped out of bed, praying that Dan was still waiting for her …

Dan snapped his head upright and looked around behind the wheel of his truck. "Fell asleep, I guess," he muttered. He spotted Alice hurrying around the corner in front of the Crave Inn and got out of the truck, sensing her urgency.

"C'mon!" she shouted. "We have to hurry! I'm driving!"

They got in the truck and Alice burnt rubber as they tore down the street.

Debbie jerked awake on her weight bench and grumbled about falling asleep. She'd been waiting for Alice and Dan, working out to pass the time and keep herself awake, but it hadn't worked. Taking a deep breath, she reached up and lifted the barbell with a heave, but—

—two horribly scarred hands closed over the barbell and pushed back down.

Debbie looked up to see a hideous man in a floppy hat, his face badly burned, his right hand in a glove of bloodstained knives.

She knew immediately that he was Freddy Krueger, and tried to push back the fear in her gut.

"I don't … believe … in you," she grunted, trying to resist him.

"That's okay," he laughed. "I believe in you."

He pushed down harder and harder until—

—her elbows snapped with a horrible crunch and bone cut through flesh, making her scream.

"No pain, no gain," he growled …

Driving like a lunatic, Alice exclaimed, "He's going after Debbie! I've gotta stop him!"

"You mean *we've* gotta stop him," Dan said. "I'm with you."

"You just feel sorry for me."

"Cut that shit out. Maybe before, but now I want to help you."

"Here we are," Alice said, turning into Debbie's driveway …

As Debbie forced herself to her feet, her broken arms dangled at her side uselessly, until—

—her forearms broke off and thunked to the floor.

Black insectlike claws slid from the stumps of her arms and burst from her shoulders, growing longer and longer, until—

—she realized what they were: cockroach legs. Black and crusty and spiny and—

—Debbie screamed, *"Give me back my bodyyyy!"*

Dan jerked awake in his truck and spotted Alice running round the corner in front of the Crave Inn. Confused, he got out of the truck as Alice shouted, "We have to hurry! I'm driving!" She got in the truck and they screeched away from the curb …

Debbie's body was literally falling apart. Pieces were dropping off, skin was peeling and flaking to reveal the insectile body beneath. She staggered across the attic toward a small door that seemed to grow larger and larger as she neared it, with roach legs ripping through her workout suit, tearing her skin and replacing her legs and joints. She threw herself through the door, but—

—her feet stuck to the floor and she fell forward. The floor was made of a thick goo … like the world's strongest glue …

Her face plopped into the substance, cutting off her breath, and she pulled her head back, fighting the sticky substance, until—

—the skin peeled from her face and she sensed the antennae that popped up from her head when she lost her skin, twitching this way and that as she looked around. She didn't want to see her face now … never again …

"He's going after Debbie," Alice said as she squealed around corners. "I've gotta stop him."

"You mean, *we've* gotta stop—" Dan stopped, looked around, blinked several times. "Wait a second. I get the weirdest feeling we've been through this before."

Alice threw him a puzzled, confused look, then it began to dawn on her. "Oh, my God. We're asleep. He's got us going in circles!" She stepped on the accelerator. "We've gotta keep going!"

A few feet away from her, Debbie saw another roach struggling in the sticky substance and she tried to scream, but—

—it came out as a clicking, insectlike sound.

Fighting the hold of the goo, she turned toward the door, spotting other roaches trapped in the thick slime. The door had become huge, now, almost like a *garage* door. She struggled toward it … fighting … pulling herself along, until—

—an enormous, godlike eye appeared in the doorway.

Debbie inched forward, looked over the edge to the outside and saw that—

—she was inside a tiny box held in Freddy's hand.

"Welcome to the Roach Hotel!" he laughed. "You can check in … but you *can't* check *out!"*

The walls began to crumble in around her, closing in faster and faster, until—

—there was only blackness …

Dan watched Alice as she maneuvered his truck through a suburban labyrinth and suddenly—

—she stiffened and her head jerked back with a horrible shudder as she cried out.

"What was *that?"* Dan asked.

"Debbie," she said, barely a whisper. "She's gone. I've … *collected* her … like the others." Her eyes widened and Dan looked out the front window to see—

—Freddy, standing in the middle of the road. He *knew* it was Freddy even though Dan had never seen him before—it *had* to be—and Dan shouted as—

—Alice slammed her foot to the floor, shouting, "Okay, asleep or awake, I'm gonna punch his fuckin' ticket!" and the truck plunged forward and Freddy grinned and waved at them, growing larger and larger in the windshield, until—

—the truck slammed into him, and—

—there was the teeth-grinding sound of crunching metal, and then —

—nothing …

Alice was jarred from sleep by the impact and immediately pried open the truck's mangled door.

Dan lay still, embracing the dashboard, his head pressed against the shattered steering wheel. The front end of the truck was hugging the fat trunk of a tree.

“Oh, Guh-God,” Alice stammered. “Sleepwalking … we were *sleepwalking* … that son of a *bitch* … he made us drive in our *sleep!* Oh, Dan, I’m sorry … God, I’m *so sorry!”* She looked around to see that there was a car parked across the street and an elderly couple was watching them.

The man crossed the street, saying, “An ambulance is coming.”

The ambulance arrived minutes later, and after bandaging Dan’s leg with gauze, they put him, moaning in pain, on a stretcher and lifted him inside. Alice got in, too, and knelt beside him. As the ambulance drove away siren wailing, one of the paramedics—a chubby, cocky man who seemed oblivious to the urgency of the situation—began filling a syringe with a clear fluid, checking it for air bubbles.

“What’s that do?” Alice asked.

“Relaxes your boyfriend,” the paramedic replied, preparing to inject the needle into Dan’s arm.

Alice slapped the syringe from the paramedic’s hand, crying, “No! He stays awake!”

“Hey,” the paramedic slurred sarcastically, picking up the syringe, “orders is orders.”

“He’s allergic, okay?”

“Well, you shoulda said something in the first place. Damned kids.”

Alice leaned close and stroked Dan’s cheek. “Don’t let them put you to sleep.”

Chapter 11

Later, in the emergency room, Alice stood across the room and watched as a nurse and an intern tried to inject Dan with a sedative. He was weak but managed to make their task difficult.

The doctor, Dan's parents, and Alice's father burst in suddenly.

"When're you going to operate?" Alice asked the doctor tremulously.

"Well, from the looks of him, probably in about fifteen minutes."

"Oh, God," Alice whispered, looking at the clock on the wall: a quarter to ten. After one more look at Dan, she turned to hurry from the room, but her father grabbed her arm, his car keys dangling from this thumb, and held her back.

"Alice," he slurred, "they'll help him."

"They're gonna kill him," she hissed, then snatched the keys from him and dashed toward the door.

"Alice, *dammit,* come back here!"

She ignored him and hurried out the exit, running across the parking lot to his car.

By the time she was on the road, driving *well* over the speed limit, the dashboard clock read 9:49. She had eleven minutes to save Dan, who, at that moment—

• • •

—was being wheeled down a corridor on a gurney. He struggled inwardly to fight the slowly-growing effects of the shot he'd received a few minutes before, but the fluorescent lights were growing fuzzier by the moment as they passed slowly and monotonously overhead. He prayed Alice would be able to do something as—

—she screeched to a halt in front of her house, raced from the car to the front door and let herself in, then hurried to the bathroom. Taking a bottle of her father's sleeping pills from the medicine cabinet, she poured several into her palm, said, "That oughtta be enough for a trip on the Freddy express," and chewed them up, then hurried to her room. Standing before her vanity, she swept several of the pictures off the mirror so she could *really* see herself, then strapped on Debbie's studded bracelet, tucked Sheila's bug-killing gadget under her belt,

and lastly, tied Rick's oriental bandanna around her forearm. Studying her reflection, she said firmly, "This ends. *Now."*

Then she sat down at the vanity, feeling the first effects of the sleeping pills as—

—Dan was lifted onto the operating table, the room being prepared quickly, with nurses checking instruments and doctors scrubbing up. The anesthesiologist appeared beside Dan and smiled down at him, lowering the gas mask slowly over Dan's face. "Just count backward from a hundred," the man said.

"No," Dan breathed. "I'll … take the pain … please … I have to … stay awake … please …"

But the mask covered his face and muffled his words as—

—Alice gasped and lifted her head from the vanity table to stare wide-eyed at her own reflection. She stood quickly, amazed by what she saw. It was herself, all right, but she'd changed …

She saw in the mirror a turbocharged image of herself … leaner and tighter … her jeans clung to her thighs, and her shirt was tied halter-like just above her waist. The bracelet had spikes where there once were rounded studs, and the gadget beneath her belt now glowed, as if emitting a powerful energy …

"Fuckin' A," she whispered as—

—Dan opened his eyes on the operating table and looked up to see a surgical-masked doctor bending over him. But the eyes above the light green mask …

… the eyes were Freddy's …

"Krueger!" Dan shouted.

"Well, it ain't Dr. Seuss," Freddy said with an evil laugh.

Dan screamed, "Alice! *Aaaaallll—*

—lliiiiice!"

The mirror shimmered like a pool, and Alice saw Freddy standing beside Dan, who lay helpless on the table.

She took three steps back from the vanity, screamed, "Get away from him, you son of a *bitch!"* and ran forward, leaving the floor and shattering the mirror with a dead-on kick as she—

—passed through the mirror and rolled over the operating room floor. Once she was on her feet, Freddy was gone. She went to the

operating table and took Dan's hand. "C'mon," she said urgently, "we're dreaming. You can get up now."

He gaped at her as he stood, saying, "Alice, you look *great.*"

"Save it for later. C'mon, we've gotta get out of here."

She led him to the swinging doors, pushed through, and—

—they found themselves in a long dark tunnel with squiggly, wormlike neon lights on the curved walls. It was a funhouse tunnel, the kind that turned slowly as you walked through it. Alice felt Dan squeeze her hand as they started down the tunnel, walking cautiously, until—

—Freddy appeared at the other end. He laughed and growled, "Out for a lover's stroll?" Then he leaned forward, gripped the edge of the tunnel and turned it until it was spinning wildly, tossing Alice and Dan head over heels.

They fought it, turning to crawl back toward the other end where—

—the operating-room door had been replaced by a round stained-glass window which grew larger as they drew nearer, until—

—they crashed through the stained glass and tumbled to the floor of an enormous, drafty church. Alice rolled over and knelt beside Dan, who looked dazed, weakened. She heard a sound … a disturbing sound …

Beeping. The beeping of the operating-room heart monitor.

"Alice?" Dan croaked as he began to fade, becoming more and more transparent.

"Dan!" she cried. "No! You can't!"

"It's too late, Alice … too late …" He grew dimmer and dimmer, until—

—he opened his eyes on the operating table and stared blearily at the faces of doctors and nurses.

"No!" he shouted. "Put me back under! I've gotta go back!"

"Relax, son," the doctor said soothingly. "It was rough, but we pulled you through."

"No … no," Dan groaned as—

—Alice stood and looked around the church cautiously. Soft voices began to sing from above, and Alice looked up to see several pale children—the emaciated children with bloated stomachs from the paintings in Freddy's living room—standing in the choir loft, singing, "One, two … Freddy's coming for you … three, four … better lock your door …"

A loud creak from behind made her turn as the fifteen-foot-tall double doors swung open to reveal Freddy standing in the doorway. He clanked his blades together and his voice echoed through the church as he called, “Welcome to *Wonderland,* Alice!”

Alice smiled, feeling her strength, her energy, and shouted, “I’m gonna send your guts back to *Hellll!”* Bracing herself, she ran down the center aisle of the church and flew into a cartwheel, aiming herself straight at Krueger, until—

—her feet landed square in the middle of his chest, sending him backward. But he only laughed.

She spun like a top, kicking with each turn, smacking her heel into Freddy’s chin again and again and *again,* but—

—Freddy only threw back his head and roared with laughter, enjoying the fight. He moved forward suddenly, wrapped an arm around her neck and whispered in her ear, “You think you’ve got what it takes? I’ve been guarding my gate a *loooonnggg* time, bitch.” Sweeping her up in his arms, he threw her across the church and—

—Alice slammed into the confessional, shattering it into jagged chunks of wood as Freddy shouted, “You have their power, but *I* have their *souls!”* Unharmed, she lay still a few moments, playing possum as she listened to Freddy’s footsteps crunch through the rubble toward her until he was close enough, then—

—she jumped to her feet, swung her fist through the wall where the confessional had been and closed her fingers around a fat electrical cable, ripping it out of the hole until it snapped in two with a shower of sparks. She snatched the gadget Sheila had made from beneath her belt and slammed the crackling end of the cable into the center of the device, and—

—a glowing blue bolt of electricity shot from it, leaping across the gap between Alice and Freddy and blasting him in the chest.

Freddy released a gut-wrenching scream then stood still a moment, looking down at his chest with amazement.

Alice had blown a hole in the child killer. She could see straight through his chest to the pews behind him. She could even see his heart beating.

Maggots squirmed from the thumping organ and glistening black roaches skittered around the gory edge of the hole.

Alice tossed her weapons aside and smiled, until—

—Freddy laughed and passed a hand over the hole in his chest casually. It disappeared; he was whole again. He grinned, moving toward her ominously. “I … am … *eternal,”* he said, smacking her across the face, then grabbing her, lifting her over his head, and

throwing her into the altar.

She landed with a crash and looked up to see him advancing on her. She knew it was for the last time. His blades were poised, ready to cut …

The children in the choir loft began to chant:

"Now I lay me down to sleep … the master of dreams my soul to keep … for in the reflections of my mind's eye …"

The remaining words suddenly came to Alice as if she'd known them all along, and she recited them with the children, at the same time sweeping a shiny, reflective shard of stained glass from the littered floor: "… let evil see itself … *and it shall DIIIEEE!"* She held up the mirrorlike glass and it shined on Freddy's face as he gazed at his own reflection and—

—he staggered backward, his mouth yawning open to scream. But the voice that screamed was not his; it was the combined voices of his young, innocent victims crying out in relief. He stumbled back against the wall as—

—his red and green striped shirt began to pulse as something beneath it moved … small young arms … reaching out of Freddy's chest and stomach … clawing at the shirt's material until—

—they tore through and the hands of Freddy's victims reached up toward his face, one clutching his jaw and pulling down hard while another dug its fingers into his eyes and another closed on his throat while another squeezed his neck and another his scarred cheek and—

—Freddy's scream became his *own,* and his tortured voice bounced through the church relentlessly as his mouth was pulled open farther and farther, until—

—thick dark blood sprayed from his eye sockets and the horribly burned skin of his face peeled away like rind and—

—his jaw tore away with a wet crunch, and a shimmering multicolored stream of light rose from his split skull. The tiny voices of happy children sang from the light, and Alice watched it rise toward the shattered window above as the voices called, "Thank you … thank you, Alice … goodbye … good-byyyeee …"

Freddy imploded and fell to the floor an empty shell.

The church was silent.

The children were gone.

Alice was alone. She walked slowly toward Freddy's remains, looked down at them a moment, then hissed, "Rest in *Hell."*

She slammed the huge doors of the church as she left …

Chapter 12

Weeks later, when Dan was finally able to get out, they went for a long walk through Springwood Park, hand in hand. Both were bruised and cut, but the injuries *inside* would take much longer to heal than those on the outside.

"I slept through all of last night," Dan said happily. "And I had no *guests* in my dreams."

"I'm still having trouble," Alice admitted. "I manage two, maybe three hours a night. I don't mind, though. Now I have more reasons to enjoy staying awake." She kissed him gently as they stopped beside a large fountain. Water sprayed into the air and cascaded into the round pool below. Dan fished in his pocket for some change. "Oh, c'mon," Alice laughed, "you don't believe in that stuff, do you?"

"Yeah, I do. And … I think you do too. Now, make a wish."

He tossed the coin in, and Alice watched the water ripple in response. As the pool's surface shimmered, Alice thought she saw, for just an instant—

—Freddy's reflection, as if he were standing across the fountain, grinning at them.

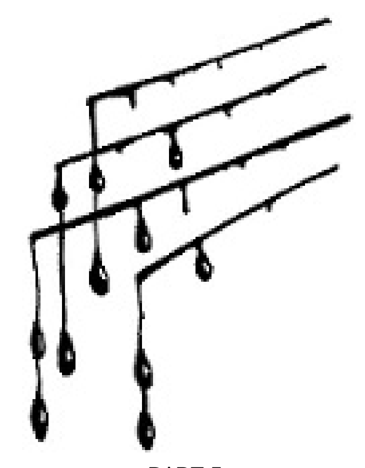
It was gone in the blink of an eye.

"What did you wish for?" Dan asked, smiling.

She stared at the water a moment longer as gooseflesh crawled over her neck and back. Freddy was gone. Standing, she said, "If I tell you, then it won't come true."

Holding hands, they walked away from the fountain together …

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET



PART 5:

The Dream Child

A novel by Joseph Locke

Written by Leslie Bohem

BASED ON THE CHARACTERS CREATED BY WES CRAVEN

NEW LINE CINEMA,

MEDIA HOME ENTERTAINMENT, INC. and

SMART EGG PICTURES Present

A ROBERT SHAYE Production

A STEPHEN HOPKINS Film

ROBERT ENGLUND in

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 5:
THE DREAM CHILD

Starring

LISA WILCOX

Casting by ANNETTE BENSON, c.s.a.

Visual Effects Supervisor ALAN MUNRO

Director of Photography PETER LEVY, a.c.s.

Production Designer C.J. STRAWN

Edited by CHUCK WEISS and BRENT SCHOENFELD

Based on Characters Created by WES CRAVEN

Written by LESLIE BOHEM

Executive Producers SARA RISHER and JON TURTLE

Produced by ROBERT SHAYE and RUPERT HARVEY

Directed by STEPHEN HOPKINS

Chapter 1

They were making love in Dan's bedroom and Alice was reaching her peak, dragging her nails over Dan's back hard enough to leave thin red tracks. She cried out and arched her back as Dan's movements became more intense, and he breathed her name into her ear before he, too, cried out and they clutched one another desperately, kissing as if it were their last moment together.

When they were finished, after several long minutes of stroking and kissing one another lovingly, Alice whispered, "I'm gonna take a shower."

Dan smiled at her sleepily and rolled aside so she could get out of bed and go into the bathroom.

At first, when she and Dan had started dating last year, Alice had thought, with resignation, that it would only be temporary, until someone prettier and more interesting came along and captured Dan's attention. But as their relationship went on, Alice found that *she* was becoming prettier and more interesting!

She turned on the shower, waited for the water to get hot, then stepped into the billowing steam and began to soap up, lifting her face to the jets of hot water.

Last year, after the deaths of her brother and friends, Alice had thought nothing good would ever happen to her again. But that had changed. Not only was she ecstatically happy with Dan, but her father had stopped drinking and started going to Alcoholics Anonymous. With graduation less than twelve hours away, Alice was happy. She scrubbed her hair, working up a lather as a gurgling sound cut through the hiss of the shower.

Alice stopped, frowned and listened. The sound was coming from below. She looked down to see—

—the water in the tub swirling frantically over the drain, being sucked loudly through the tiny round holes.

She stepped back from the drain, frowning. The drain was sucking the water into an unnaturally violent whirlpool. The pull was so strong that Alice could feel her feet slipping over the bottom of the tub toward the drain … slipping … slipping … until—

—her legs flew out from under her and she landed on her ass, sliding down the tub toward the drain, fighting the tremendous pull, her arms flailing as—

—she was sucked down into an oppressive blackness through which she plummeted helplessly until—

—she landed in a naked heap on a cold floor. She huddled into a crouched position, hugging herself to hide her nakedness in the dim light as she listened to the sound of loud babbling voices. She turned slowly, fearfully, and looked down a long narrow room with plain metal-framed beds lined against the walls on either side. There were mattresses on the floor, some of them ripped to shreds. There were men moving in the shadows, some on the beds, others walking or crawling on the cold dirty floor. They wore what appeared to be pajamas that had once been white; now they were darkened by brown and yellow stains, and grimy lumps clung to the material. The men looked filthy, their hair scraggly and shiny with grease. Some of them masturbated in dark corners, grunting wetly as their eyes rolled in their heads; others laughed as they picked at their clothes and scrubbed their faces again and again. Some of the men paced frantically, murmuring to themselves as if their lives were about to end.

None of them noticed her.

Not yet, anyway, she thought with a sudden jolt of fear. A sound made her turn around to face a steep metal staircase that led to a thick lead door. Two men with name tags on their white institutional uniforms stood in the doorway, backlit by a glaring white light.

"How many you think there are?" one asked.

"I'd make it one hundred," the other said.

Their voices echoed in the cavernous room.

Alice took a breath to shout at them for help, but she realized suddenly that she was wearing clothes. She stood slowly and looked down at herself. She was wearing a nurse's uniform with a name tag over her left breast; it read AMANDA KRUEGER. Before she could react to the change, one of the orderlies shouted from above:

"Merry Christmas, lunatics!" He slammed the lead door with a thunderous clang. Heavy bolts slammed into place.

Alice screamed, "No! Wait!"

She was startled by the sudden silence behind her, and turned to see the men facing her. Some of them smiled, others laughed, and a few just grunted, drooling as they reached out for her, staggering forward.

Terrified, Alice stumbled backward and turned, but—

—there were more of them; they came from every direction. She screamed as a voice rose from the group:

"Me first! I'm first! Lemme through!"

A thin, hunched man pushed his way through the crowd, cackling

as he grinned at her with wet lips. Alice dropped to her knees, fists clenched, screaming, because—

—the man pressing toward her looked so familiar. His skin was smooth and he had hair … he had not been burned, but his eyes, his nose, his mouth … even his voice … she had seen him before …

… he looked like Freddy Krueger.

The wiry man slobbered as he reached out, grabbed her hair and—

—Alice screamed, opening her eyes and looking down to see—

—Dan. She lay on top of him and he stared up at her, shocked. Alice gave a sigh, relieved that her nightmare was over, and reached out to stroke Dan's cheek. He smiled, but—

—his smile became a sinister grin and he moved quickly, violently, rolling Alice onto her back, and she cried out, startled, looking up as —

—the slobbering man grinned down at her, clutching her shoulders as he worked his way between her legs, grunting, "You love it, Alice! Don't you? Alice? *Alice?"*

"Nooo!" she screamed, as—

—Dan shook her, shouting, "Alice? *Alice?"*

She stopped and gaped at him with wide eyes.

"It's okay, sweetheart," he whispered. "It's only me."

As her heart pounded in her chest, she muttered, "Oh … guess I was having … a nightmare …"

Dan kissed her forehead and whispered, "It's okay now. It's okay …"

Chapter 2

"And so, my fellow graduates," Dan said with mock solemnity, standing on the edge of the fountain in front of Springwood High shortly after the graduation ceremonies, "let me remind you that the world is your oyster."

Mark sat on the grass sweeping his pencil over his sketchpad, stopping to push his thick horn-rimmed glasses up on his nose as a few other graduates—including Alice—stood around, watching Dan with amused chuckles as parents and other students filed out of the gymnasium. Mark was drawing a comic-book illustration of Dan, glancing up at him now and then as his hand moved quickly. He'd shed his cap and gown and wore a Judge Dredd T-shirt and blue jeans.

"The sky is the limit!" Dan went on. "Nothing succeeds like success! And if you think the glass is half empty … then piss in it until it's *full!* I thank you." Dan bowed to the smattering of applause that rose up from his scattered audience, then he threw his cap into the air hard, and it came down—

—onto Mark, who dropped his sketchpad to lean forward and catch it. As he sat up again, Mark saw that Greta had picked up his pad and was standing a few feet away, paging through it. His face flushed; there were several pictures of *her* in there.

Greta was an eye-popper. She was fair-skinned with cascading blond hair and a body that was fashion-model thin. In fact, she planned to become a model. But that was part of her problem; she was ultrathin and tried too hard to stay that way. It would be unfair to say Greta ate like a bird; when Mark was a little kid, he'd had a canary that ate more in six months than he'd seen Greta eat during their entire senior year. Even so, Greta was beautiful and Mark adored her—but he didn't want *her* to know that, so he lunged for the sketchpad. It was too late.

Greta looked at him and smiled gently. "Can I have one of these?" she asked, holding up a picture of herself.

Mark shriveled with embarrassment.

"Come on, a graduation present to your *inspiration?* Who, by the way, would've charged you seventeen-fifty an hour if she'd known she was modeling for your drawings." She smiled, but—

—Mark dropped Dan's graduation cap, snatched the book away from her and swept it behind his back. Then, after a moment, he

opened it, drew a straight line, tore out the page and handed it to her, saying, “That’s a profile.”

She looked at it and scowled. “Come *on,* Mark, if I’m going to stand a chance modeling in New York, I’ve *got* to be thin.”

Standing, Mark said with smiling concern, “But at the rate you’re going, Greta, you’ll waste away before you make the cover of *Vogue* and marry the rock star of your choice.”

Greta stuck her nose in the air, feigning annoyance. “Rock stars were *so* mid-eighties.”

Yvonne and Alice approached them, and Yvonne said, “I believe the current trend is more toward international corporate bankers.”

Yvonne was tall, black, and very attractive, although in a more mature way than Greta. She was a student at the university, working as a nurse’s aid as she finished her nursing education. She held up a key on a large metal ring.

“This,” she said, “is the key to the university pool, which officially closes at six o’clock.”

“Would that mean that our party officially starts at seven?” Mark asked.

“That’s the opinion of those in the know,” Alice said with a conspiratorial smile. She looked tired but still pretty. Just a year ago she’d been so plain, so unnoticeable. Mark supposed that losing as many loved ones as Alice had would tend to make one grow up fast.

“Yo, super jock!” Yvonne shouted, waving the key at Dan. “Seven o’clock!”

Dan smiled and headed for them as his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jordan, came out of the gymnasium and crossed the grass.

“Careful climbing around on that fountain, Dan,” Mr. Jordan said. “We can’t have State’s star running back breaking his leg the day he graduates from high school.” He slapped his son on the back. “You know, being on a campus like this, I was thinking about my last game, senior year.”

Mark saw Dan and Mrs. Jordan exchange a knowing here-we-go-again look.

“We were playing the Magnolia Rangers,” Mr. Jordan went on. “Fourth quarter, ten seconds left. The Rangers have the ball … and old Tom Peters lets fly with this bullet pass, and … well, sir, *I* intercept it …”

In unison, Dan and Mrs. Jordan chimed, “… and run it back eighty yards for the winning touchdown.”

Mr. Jordan blinked and smiled good naturedly. “Have I told you that one?”

“Three times,” Dan said warmly. “This *week*. You’re senile, Dad. Your memory’s going. We’re putting you in a home.”

Mr. Jordan tapped the side of his head and said, “Budweiser’s disease.”

Mark stepped away from the Jordans and turned to Yvonne and Alice, saying, “About that party … you’ve got the pool key, but how are we gonna get past ‘Officer’ Beland, ace security guard?”

Yvonne grinned. “Be in the bushes behind the employee parking lot at five to seven, and bring your towel.” Noticing that Alice was watching Dan, Yvonne said, “Why don’t you go over and help Dan flex his muscles.”

Mark noticed Greta walking back toward the gymnasium looking at the paper he’d given her after drawing a straight line on it; he had second thoughts and started after her. “Hey, Greta!” he called. When she stopped and turned, he asked, “Were you serious? Would you really like one of the pictures?”

She smiled. *“Yes!* I thought they were very good.”

He opened the sketchpad and tore one out, handing it to her, not without embarrassment.

She looked at the drawing proudly, smiled, whispered, “Thank you,” and leaned forward to give him a quick kiss on the mouth.

Marks’ chest swelled and he grinned as he watched her walk away, admiring the picture he’d drawn …

“Hello,” Alice said to Dan’s parents. Mrs. Jordan gave her that worried look that seemed to be typical of all mothers who realize they’re losing their boy to another woman.

“Congratulations,” Mr. Jordan said warmly. “You looked *so* nice today.”

“Thank you.”

Mrs. Jordan lifted her eyebrows and said, “We didn’t get a chance to say hello to your father. He left so quickly.”

“Yes, I guess he had … some business.” Alice didn’t know *why* her father had left so quickly; she wished he’d stuck around.

“Won’t it be nice never to walk those hallowed halls again?” Dan laughed, waving toward the school. “One month from now we’ll be in Paris, and high school will just be a memory. A bad dream.”

Alice smiled and tingled at the very thought of their coming trip to Europe.

“Dan,” Mr. Jordan said, “you’ve got a full athletic scholarship to State College. Pro scouts are already sniffing around. You’d better

come home from Europe ready to run."

"Didn't I tell you?" Dan said jovially. "We've already decided to defect to Bulgaria. We're never coming home."

Mrs. Jordan turned to Alice and asked sternly, "Alice, how does *your* father feel about this trip to Europe?"

As if sensing trouble, Mr. Jordan took her arm and led her away, winking at Dan and Alice as he said, "Honey, did I ever tell you about the time we were playing the Magnolia Rangers …?"

Dan turned to Alice, studied her face a moment and said, "Something—I mean, something besides my *mother*—is bothering you."

"My dream," she whispered.

"You never talked about it. It wasn't … *him,* was it?"

"Not exactly. But this was the first time since … well, since last year … that I wasn't in control."

"You want to tell me about it?" he asked, stroking her cheek.

She smiled and nodded. On their way home she shared her dream with Dan …

As Dan parked his truck outside Alice's house, he said, "It could just be a dream. I mean, a *regular* dream."

"If anyone knows what's a regular dream and what's something more, I'd guess it's me, wouldn't you?" He nodded and they were quiet for a moment as she stared out the window. With determination, she shook her head, unwilling to let the dream get to her. Too many good things were happening. "To hell with him!" she snapped, turning to Dan. "I was his only doorway, and I'm *not* letting him back in!" She leaned over, kissed Dan and said, "I hear Switzerland has two hundred and seventy-five kinds of chocolate. I plan to eat one of each."

"What time do you want to go to the party?" Dan asked.

"I can't. I'm working."

"But I thought you and Yvonne were in on this together. The plan to get past Mad Dog Beland, dread campus guard—"

"Don't worry, we've got it covered."

"Then you *have* to go to the—"

She cut him off: "Those Swiss chocolates cost money, y'know." She kissed him again, then got out of the truck. When she was halfway to the door, Dan called her name. She turned to see him smiling bashfully at her; he looked away, then at her again.

"Well … you know," he said.

"I love you too," she called.

In the house, Alice's father asked, "Where have you been?"

"With Dan."

On his way out of the living room, he said, "Well, get in the kitchen and fix dinner."

His words caused her pain. She started for the kitchen, murmuring sarcastically, "Congratu-*lations,* darling … this must be the happiest day of your *life,* darling … you looked *lovely,* darling … I was so proud of my little—"

She stopped dead in her tracks as she entered the kitchen.

The room was filled with flowers. Roses, carnations, daisies, lilies, and orchids filled the kitchen with their sweet fragrance. A smile grew slowly on Alice's face; she was unable to hold back the tears that stung her eyes. She spun around to see her father standing in the doorway. His face still held its gruff, emotionless expression, but he stepped forward and touched her face.

"You looked so pretty up there today," he whispered.

She threw herself at him, squeezing him tightly. "I didn't see you afterwards."

"I left because I didn't want to … you know … embarrass you. Your father, the *drunk."*

"The *alcoholic!"* she snapped. "There's a big difference. Unless you stop going to your meetings."

He smiled wearily. "Clean and sober and … *boring.* That's your old man."

She smiled at him for a moment, then noticed the kitchen clock: twelve before seven. "I've gotta change for work," she said. "Anne will have a fit if I'm late." She turned to leave, then stopped, turned back and smiled lovingly. "I love my flowers, Daddy."

He looked away, embarrassed.

Chapter 3

Forty-five minutes after Richard Beland got off his motorcycle and began his shift as security guard, the telephone at his station rang and he unlocked the metal box in which it was housed. “Telephone Station Seven,” he answered.

“Is this Officer Beland?” a female voice asked.

“It is.”

“This is Lieutenant Clemmens with the state police. Why the *hell* are you answering this phone?” she snapped.

“I-I-I’m afraid I don’t understand,” the little overweight man said.

“I guess *not.* Why aren’t you out on I-45? Isn’t your relief man there yet?”

“No, ma’am.”

“You never received my ten-thirteen?”

“An *assist-officer* call? *No,* ma’am!” Beland had been outgrowing his uniform for some time, but it wasn’t until that moment that he really noticed its snugness around his jutting belly.

“Do I have to do *everything* myself around here?” the woman shouted. “Let me go through it again …”

Alice dressed for work as she spoke into her speaker phone in a firm, angry voice: “There’s a near *riot* out on the Interstate! Kids from *your* university. You’re being asked to assist the state police because of your experience in dealing with students. Your relief man was supposed to be there at oh … um, 1800 hours. We can’t afford to wait any *longer!* Now. I’m going to personally give you directions to the riot site … ready?”

Thrilled by the prospect of helping the state police, Beland fumbled the pad and pencil out of his pockets and wrote down the directions in scribbles, saying, “But that’s a two and a half hour dri—uh, I mean, I’ll get right on it. Fast as I can, ma’am.” He hung up the phone and hurried to his motorcycle in the parking lot as—

—Dan, Mark, Yvonne, and Greta watched him waddle across the parking lot, stifling their laughs.

“Hang onto that girl, Dan,” Yvonne whispered. “She knows how to make a *hell* of a phone call. Okay, guys, we’ve got until midnight.” Gathering their things together, they headed toward the pool …

Dusk began to fall as Alice walked to work. She was hurrying along the sidewalk, not wanting to be late, when—

—she heard a sound … a *singsong* sound … like chanting softly …

She slowed her pace as she began to pass through Springwood Park to go into town, and looked through the fence to the children playing in the park … they were jumping rope … sitting in the mounds of sand between the swing set and the monkey bars … very familiar children …

Their skin was ghostly white, their eyes dark and stomachs bloated, and they were chanting, “One, two … Freddy’s coming for you … three, four, better lock the door …”

As they counted on and on, Alice stopped and watched them, whispering to herself, “This should *not* be happening …”

She hurried by them, trying desperately to ignore them and their ominous chanting, heading toward the open green in the middle of the park, when she noticed that the children had added a new couplet to the rhyme: “Nine, ten … he’s coming back again …”

She spun toward them, but they were gone. Turning back again to head for work, she saw that—

—where there had been nothing a moment ago, there now stood an imposing Gothic-style building with stone walls and towers. She somehow knew—although she had no idea *how* she knew—that it was a Catholic hospital … a sort of *convent,* too, because nuns in sparkling white habits walked in and out of doorways and scurried across the green grass surrounding the sinister building.

I’m awake, Alice thought. *I’m not dreaming* … *why is this happening?*

Unable to resist her curiosity, she moved toward the building and walked through the enormous entrance … into a dark, musty corridor … past an empty nurse’s station … past endless open doors that led into utter darkness … and there was a smell … sweet and sickly and disturbing …

As she rounded a corner, Alice caught a glimpse of a white gown disappearing through a doorway with a quiet rustle. She chased the nun, hoping for an explanation …

Hurrying into the room after her, Alice saw a metal spiral staircase going up into the misty darkness. Looking around, she could not see the nun, so she started up the staircase. A dozen steps up the staircase there was a clang and—

—the step beneath her foot gave way and Alice plummeted down into the darkness and—

—she landed on her back on a moving gurney … a ceiling passed above her rapidly, and she jerked as the gurney was pushed through double doors with a *bang!* Nurses in white habits and doctors in surgical wear surrounded the gurney as it was rushed down a corridor. Confused, Alice looked down at herself and saw that—

—her belly was horribly distended beneath the sheet, almost as if she were …

Pregnant! Alice thought, horrified.

"You're going to be all right," one of the doctors said through his green surgical mask. "I want you to do exactly what I say."

Alice sat up on the gurney and screamed, "No! This isn't happening!"

She froze. The gurney had stopped in the delivery room and she was staring at a crowd of observers … nurses, nuns, priests, and—

—herself!

The air around her became thick, seemed to shift, and, in the blink of an eye—

—she was standing in the group of observers looking at the gurney, where a young woman lay, her face glistening with perspiration, her eyes wide with pain and confusion. The woman—her dark brown hair clinging to her sweaty forehead—looked directly at Alice and hissed, "We must *end* the evil! You and me. We must … we *must* … we—"

Her body stiffened and she cried out in pain as she writhed in the clutches of a contraction.

"Work with me!" the doctor exclaimed. "C'mon … c'mon, now, breathe … here it comes … *breathe!"*

The woman jutted her pelvis as the doctor and a white-habited nurse leaned between her legs, and she opened her mouth as if to yawn, cried out in pain, and—

—the doctor groaned, "Sweet Jesus Christ, what … is … *that?"*

The nurse bundled something in a cloth and held it to her breast, murmuring, "One of God's creatures."

The woman on the gurney sat up and said breathlessly, "God had *nothing* to do with *that!"*

The nurse looked at her, shocked, her face turning almost as white as her habit.

"That child," the woman gasped, "was conceived in *pure* … *evil!"*

The nurse backed away from her, looking down at the baby and—

—tiny arms jutted from the cloth and small hands clutched the

nurse's throat, making her stumble back against the wall, and as she slid to the floor, the child—the *thing*—shot from beneath the blanket and scurried across the floor like a giant insect, making a horrible braying sound as—

—the doctors and other nurses staggered backward, gasping at what they saw, and—

—Alice cried out as the small creature headed toward her, a blur of glistening gray and pink streaking across the floor, and Alice dove out of the way as the creature shot through the delivery room doors, and quickly getting to her feet, Alice turned to see that—

—the delivery room was *empty*.

Frightened but determined, Alice moved toward the swinging double doors of the delivery room and pushed through to see that—

—she was no longer in a hospital. Her surroundings had changed … for the *worst* …

Alice now stood in a church. Not just *any* church … it was the church in which she had last seen Freddy … the church in which she *thought* she'd defeated him and freed his young, helpless victims …

The dark church echoed with the bone-chilling animal-like shriek of the child-thing that had scurried out of the delivery room a few moments ago. It came from somewhere in the seemingly endless columns of pews.

Alice moved up the center aisle with caution, pausing a moment when the shrieking was replaced by an unspeakable wet gulping sound that seemed to draw nearer.

Up ahead, in a dusty heap on the floor at the foot of the pulpit, Alice spotted Freddy's remains: the tattered red and green striped sweater, the wrinkled hat and pants, the rusted claw that glimmered dully in a dusty shaft of stain-glassed light. Alice pressed on, muttering deliberately, "This is over … this is over," until—

—the gulping stopped and something moved from behind the pulpit.

Something small … vaguely human … with gleaming, flayed skin …

It ran its small tongue around its frayed lips as it moved toward Freddy's remains … and as it neared the small pile, it grew more and more human, taking on the all-too-familiar features of the man—the *thing*—that had once worn those clothes, that claw …

Seeing the sense of dark purpose in the creature's eyes, Alice screamed, "No! Goddammit, *nooo!"* and lunged toward the altar as—

—the creature scurried into Freddy's filthy pants, slobbering as it disappeared beneath the material, and—

—Alice ran up the aisle toward the altar, halted suddenly by the

thunderous sound of wood being ripped like paper! The floor beneath the altar was splintering, breaking open, rising up to suddenly form a sort of wooden hill that threw Alice backward and off her feet. She crawled desperately up the growing incline, determined to stop what she was certain was about to happen—what she was certain she was powerless to prevent—all the while thinking, *This can't be happening! I can't be dreaming! I'M NOT ASLEEEEP!*

Wood groaned and cracked …

Glass shattered …

Plumes of choking dust filled the air …

Alice clawed at the lifting floor, trying to pull herself up the incline, keeping her eyes on Freddy's clothes as—

—they filled out, as if being inflated, and suddenly—

—the floor fell back into place with a great explosion of sound and dust and—

—Alice felt the impact through her entire body as—

—dead silence fell over the church.

Alice lay on the floor, still for a moment, then lifted her head. Her eyes fell on Freddy's clawed glove lying beside the altar.

A horribly burned hand reached out from behind the pulpit and snatched the glove up with a faint clatter.

Alice stiffened, scrambled to her feet and stared up at the altar. Beams of light filtered through the shifting dust as a vague figure appeared from behind the pulpit.

Knives scraped over wood.

A laugh cut the silence.

As the dust cleared she saw him—Freddy—staring down at himself, inspecting his body. Then he smiled at her and quipped, "It's a *boy.*"

"No!" she screamed. *"You're dead!"*

"That never stopped me before …"

Growing furious, she shouted, "I closed the *door* on you!"

"Somebody must've left the key in the lock."

I fought him before, Alice thought, running determinedly up the center aisle, *I'll fight him again,* but—

—Freddy was gone. The only movement on the altar was dust.

"There's no such thing as safe sex," he said suddenly directly behind her.

Alice spun around to see his gruesome, filthy-toothed grin. He cackled as he lifted his razor-fingered hand, and—

—the church doors groaned as they swung open and a long rectangle of light fell down the center aisle over them.

Freddy spun around and Alice looked to the door to see—

—the woman who had given birth to the child-thing. She wore her bloody hospital gown and looked horribly pale. She pointed a finger at Freddy accusingly, and when she spoke, her voice sounded old … so *old* …

"You were conceived in fear and hatred … born in guilt and pain …"

She changed before Alice's eyes. She became old, her skin wrinkling, sagging … and the hospital gown she wore became a white nun's habit as she said, "I can never forgive you for what you've done …"

Alice realized that Freddy was backing away slowly, and she saw in his face, for the first time ever, utter *horror*. That horror quickly decayed into a burning rage, and he made a hateful sound deep in his throat as he spun around and, in a few quick steps, disappeared.

Turning to the door again, Alice saw the nun walking away. The doors swung closed slowly.

"Wait!" Alice called, hurrying after her, throwing the doors open to see—

—the Crave Inn.

The diner was completely empty, except for Anne, who tossed an angry glare at Alice from behind the register. Alice looked down at herself to see that she was wearing the clothes she'd put on for work.

"Why's it so empty?" she whispered.

"You're over four hours *late,* is why," Anne snapped, throwing an apron at Alice. "The party's probably over. You went. Didn't you?"

Alice didn't catch the apron and it dropped to the floor. "Four hours?" she breathed in a stunned whisper. She looked at the clock.

It read eleven-fifteen …

Chapter 4

Dan lay beside the pool, watching as Yvonne dove gracefully into the water. As the others applauded, Dan's eyes grew heavy and began to close. He figured it must have been the beer that Yvonne had brought; he'd had a couple and they'd probably made him sleepy. He leaned his head back and allowed himself to relax … to doze …

Somewhere in the murky darkness of his nap a telephone rang. Dan opened his eyes.

"So was I twice cool getting that pool key?" Yvonne asked as she seated herself beside him, dripping wet. "Or was I twice cool?"

Mark said, "Beats going over to Dan's and watching his dad's video of every single play Dan ran last season."

The telephone kept ringing … ringing and ringing …

Greta made a grand entrance then, wearing a beautiful red and black strapless dress.

"Gorgeous, as usual," Mark whispered.

"Thanks!" Greta called.

Mark blushed, embarrassed that she'd heard him.

"Too bad I missed the party getting dressed," she laughed, coming toward them.

Dan closed his eyes again as they talked, but was jolted suddenly by Mark. The telephone had stopped ringing and a jock in T-shirt and cutoffs stood before them.

"Dan, you gotta phone call in the office," the jock said.

As Dan headed for the office, Greta said, "Hey, that party Karen's friends are having will still be going. Let's go over there before Officer Beland gets back."

"You *hate* Karen!" Yvonne said.

"Yeah, but I *love* my new dress …"

In the cluttered office Dan picked up the telephone. "Hello?"

"Dan?" It was Alice, and she sounded frantic. "It happened again. Just *now.* And this time I wasn't even *asleep!"*

"What?"

"Something very weird is happening, Dan. It's Krueger again … but he's stronger … and this time he wants something *different."*

"Where are you?"

"I'm at work. Please … *hurry …"*

Dan rushed out of the office and past the pool.

"Is there a fire?" Mark asked.

"I've just … gotta go. See ya."

In his truck, as he sped through the night, Dan began to feel sleepy again. He turned on the radio with the volume high and caught a call-in talk show. It was one he'd heard before, with a typically abrasive host who abused his guests and callers.

"Right, lady," the host growled, "and Frank Sinatra killed Marilyn because the Kennedy's put fluoride in his water. What's the *matter,* lady? Did you go off your *medication?"*

The caller replied urgently, "But what the CIA is doing in Central America is a very real issue and I—"

"You wanna talk *issue,* lady? How about the *crap* that's *issuing* from your *mouth?"* He cut her off with a click and said, "Springwood, you're on the air."

"Yes," a woman said, "I'm calling about my son. He's an ungrateful bastard!"

Dan blinked in shock. The voice was so familiar! But … it couldn't be.

"His father and I have slaved to see that he gets a good education, and *now* he wants to throw his life away and take a worthless little *bitch* to *Europe!"*

"Mom!" Dan barked, nearly swerving the truck.

"Well, if I were you, lady," the host said, "I'd *kill* the little piggy!"

Dan quickly changed the station, and loud speed metal pounded from the speakers. His hands trembled as he steered, horrified by his mother's words. His headlights sliced the night as the truck picked up speed.

"Mom …" he whispered, confused and hurt.

The truck was going faster now … faster and faster … the music on the radio grew louder, although Dan had not adjusted the volume. Dan started to lift his foot from the gas pedal, but something made a sound on the floorboard and he looked down to see—

—four glistening metal cables with transparent viscous skins snaking out of the floorboard and around his foot, pulling it down on the gas pedal! He cried out, struggling to pull his foot free, but the cables were stronger and the truck plunged forward, going faster … faster … *faster …*

Something touched his arms and he looked down in horror as—

—the safety belt slithered around his arms and pried them away

from the steering wheel. As the truck careened across the center divider, Dan screamed and struggled with the belts, finally jerking his arms free and trying to regain control of the truck. It was no use; the truck had reached an incredible speed. The hood flew up, obscuring Dan's view, then flew from its hinges and into the night. Everything around Dan became a dark blur, until—

—he found himself looking out the windshield at rusted pulley chains hanging from above. The hooks on the ends of the chains clanged against the sides of the truck as it plummeted through them, heading toward—

—an open furnace glowing with flames. As Dan stared into the nearing inferno, he realized with sickening clarity what was happening and turned to kick his way out the passenger door, but—

—Freddy sat beside him, grinning.

"Buckle up," Freddy laughed as—

—the truck crashed into the furnace, into the flames, and, screaming, Dan stood up behind the wheel, but—

—the furnace was gone and the truck was speeding down the road again.

"Stop it, Krueger!" Dan screamed as the safety belt began to snake over his lap again, moving toward his arms. Reaching for the stick shift to shift down, Dan closed his fist around the gear knob and—

—long blades sprang from the small plastic sphere and closed like fingers around Dan's hand. They *were* fingers—*Freddy's* fingers—and the razor-sharp edges sliced cleanly through Dan's flesh, drawing blood. He slammed his foot onto the brake and the truck came to such a sudden halt that the rear end rose three feet off the road. He looked out the windows to see that he was in the boiler room again, the truck motionless now. The chains and hooks clanged gently against the body of the truck, as if moved by a slight breeze.

"Son of a bitch," Dan hissed, holding his breath, until—

—the chains began to move, wrapping themselves around the truck and becoming taut as they lifted the vehicle off the ground and into the air, moving it slowly toward the raging boiler up ahead.

The pickup's interior grew hot quickly as the flames drew nearer, and Dan panicked, fumbling to open the door, but—

—the handle would not budge, and he began kicking the door frantically as—

—the flames licked the truck and slithered across the windshield, shattering the glass, and—

—Dan screamed one final time as—

—he sat up on his towel beside the pool, startled by the ringing of a

telephone.

His right hand was bleeding …

Dan struggled to his feet, hurried into the office and answered the telephone.

“Dan?” Alice asked. “You’re … okay?”

“Yeah, yeah … I think. I’ll tell you when I get there. I’m on my way.” He hung up and rubbed his eyes a moment, breathing deeply. He still felt tired, but he *couldn’t* go back to sleep; he had to get to Alice.

Something was very wrong …

He started out of the office when a man’s voice said quietly, “Clean-up time.”

Dan froze, certain he was being confronted by Freddy again. He turned to see Officer Beland standing at the edge of the pool. His eyes were narrowed angrily above chubby cheeks, and the lights from beneath the pool cast his shadow on the wall in an enormous wavering blob of darkness.

Beland gestured toward the empty beer cans scattered around the pool and said, “You kids have a good time?”

I don’t have time for this shit! Dan thought as he bolted for the door.

“Hey, come back here!” Beland called.

Dan jogged across the parking lot toward his truck, knowing the fat little man would never catch up with him. He opened the truck’s door, hiked up a leg to get in, but—

—he realized he’d left his keys beside the pool. He turned back to see Beland waddling across the parking lot, huffing and puffing.

Turning to Beland’s motorcycle parked just a few feet away, he hesitated a moment, then thought, *What the hell,* and hopped onto the bike, kicking it to life.

“Come back with my bike, you little prick!” Beland shouted as Dan roared into the night.

As he sped away from the university and headed for the Crave Inn, the motorcycle wobbled indecisively beneath him. The closest Dan had ever come to driving a motorcycle was five years ago, when he’d tried out his cousin’s new minibike, so he was not feeling very confident. As he began to grow more comfortable on the bike—

—the front wheel was thrown upward into a wheelie and the engine gave a bone-shuddering growl as the bike shot down the road at a suddenly accelerated speed … a *frightening* speed …

As he struggled to keep the motorcycle balanced, Dan clutched the brakes, but with no results. The bike moved faster and faster through the night, and the lights of the houses along the road became a

creamy blur as the bike's frame began to vibrate dangerously beneath him. He dodged oncoming headlights that shot past him like missiles. When he looked down at the gauges, he saw that each one was trembling at its maximum capacity.

When it seemed the motorcycle could go no faster, it increased its speed even more, and Dan felt his face distort as if it were melting beneath the g forces, felt his eyes sting, and suddenly—

—the gauges began to spit sparks and their glass faces cracked and Dan struggled to look down as—

—the gauges sizzled and melted into a glistening mound of liquid metal and plastic, undulating wetly, beginning to slowly change shape, almost as if they were … taking on facial features … almost—but not quite—*human* features.

"Kruuueeegerrr!" Dan screamed as the face grinned up at him from the space occupied, moments ago, by the bike's gauges.

The brake levers on the handlebars split with a metallic *clang* into four long shiny blades and clamped down over Dan's hands, pressing harder and harder, until they cut into the flesh between his knuckles and—

—riblike ridges rose up from the glossy black gas tank, creating a sort of torso beneath the grinning face; the torso began to expand and contract with deep breaths. The ribs extended downward on each side of the bike, forming organic, *breathing* pipes that disappeared into the bike's engine, and—

—each pipe began to bulge and throb, as if something were pressing to get out, until new exhaust pipes appeared with a sound like splintering bone. They began to glow a deep, burning red as they grew hotter and hotter, until—

—they wrapped around Dan's bare legs, blackening his skin with a crackling sizzle, and—

—the claws on the handlebars reached up suddenly, grabbed Dan's shoulders and jerked him down until his tortured face was inches from Freddy's.

"Let the good times *roll!"* Freddy laughed, pushing him upright again, and—

—Dan screamed as the claws raked down his bare arms, cutting red trails through the flesh as the pipes burned into his legs, cooking their way through muscle tissue, and—

—his scream became a pathetic gurgle in his throat when he saw the headlights of his own truck rushing head-on toward the motorcycle, and—

—metal screamed and glass shattered as Dan tumbled from the bike

and broke through the windshield of his truck, landing upright behind the wheel as the truck sped on into the night. He clutched the wheel and felt for the brake pedal to slow the truck. Something moved beside him. He glanced to his right to see—

—Freddy, leaning casually against the passenger door as lights streaked by outside. He hissed, "Freddy says, 'Don't *dream* … and *drive.'* " He pointed ahead through the windshield, and Dan followed his gaze as—

—a monstrous semi thundered down on them, its horn roaring, and Dan screamed, *"Aaaaliiice!"* as—

—Alice slapped a juicy-pink hamburger patty onto the grill and pressed it down with the spatula as the radio played tinny rock and roll. As the meat sizzled, she picked up the coffeepot to pour a cup for her single late-night customer, when suddenly—

—the room seemed to melt around her and the sounds—the sizzling burger and the radio—decayed into warbling gurgles, and Alice dropped the coffeepot to the floor as—

—the wall ahead of her melted away like hot wax and she was looking down a long deserted road beneath a starry sky. Far up ahead, headlights appeared like pinpricks of light. They grew larger and larger … larger still … and she recognized Dan's truck, began to hear his voice—

—*"Aaaaliiice! Aaaaliiice!"*—

—and even saw his face more and more clearly as the truck bore down on her at an incredible speed, and just as she noticed Dan was not alone inside—

—the truck reached her, looked as if it might run her down, but instead—

—it disappeared, leaving only Dan's face before her, growing larger and larger, until it completely filled her vision, then—

—it stopped, cried *"Aaaaliiice!"* one more time, then began to fall away from her, and she tried unsuccessfully to catch him, as—

—Dan fell down a long, pink, membranous tunnel … the walls pulsated around him … juices glistened as they gathered between the folds of the smooth pink membrane … and as Dan disappeared—

—Alice doubled over suddenly, clutching her stomach as a deadly pain ripped through her abdomen. She staggered against the counter, crying out in pain, gasping for breath until the pain passed.

When she stood, the image was gone. She was back in the diner, and her customer was leaning over the counter, calling, "You okay? Honey? You okay? You want me to call—"

“No!” she shouted, dashing toward the door. “No, no, please, God, *no!”* Feeling sick with dread, she ran into the street and looked in the direction from which she knew Dan would come.

Alice clawed her face and screamed.

Several hundred yards down the street a jackknifed semi was curled around a flaming wad of crumpled metal. A jammed horn wailed in the night.

Panicking, Alice ran toward the accident, and the horn grew louder in her ears as she rounded the truck and—

—a man lurched from around the corner, his face badly cut and bleeding. He grabbed Alice’s shoulders and shook her, screaming, “He came outta nowhere! *Nowhere!* Like he was going a thousand miles an hour! Like—like—like he was on a *fucking rocket to hell!”*

Sirens grew closer as Alice tore herself away from the hysterical truck driver and turned to see—

—Dan. She staggered backward, bile rising from her gut.

His face was gone. So was part of his *head.* He was pinned in the mass of charred metal, and the fire was toying with his skin.

Alice spun away from it as the night filled with flashing red and blue lights. She dropped to her knees, and then the pavement began to fly up toward her face.

Alice passed out …

Chapter 5

Alice opened her eyes to see Yvonne sitting beside her bed, wearing her white uniform and name tag.

Yvonne stood and touched Alice's arm, whispering, "God, Alice, I'm so, um … so …"

It took a moment for realization to wash over Alice, but when it did —when she remembered the horrible vision she'd had and the carnage she'd seen in the street outside the Crave Inn—she sat bolt upright and hissed, "It was Freddy! My God, he used to do it when I was asleep … *just* when I was asleep … but something's changed that!"

"Hey, hey, slow down, you're not making sense."

"Where am I?"

"In the *hospital.* Under observation."

"How did Dan die?"

Yvonne blinked at her, confused, and said, "In an accident … with a semi …"

"Yeah, see … he can *do* that … make your dream death look like something *real!"* Alice's panic gathered like phlegm in her throat and her words stammered to a halt.

When Yvonne glanced across the room, Alice followed her gaze and saw a long rectangular window. On the other side of the glass stood her dad, the Jordans, and a tall balding man in a white coat with a stethoscope dangling from the coat's pocket.

"Look, maybe I'd better get Dr. Morris," Yvonne said.

Alice snapped, "No, maybe you'd better *listen* to *me,* because *he's just getting started!"*

The door was pushed open and Alice's dad followed the doctor into the room. The doctor's name tag read, DR. L. MORRIS.

When her dad took her hand, Alice ignored the doctor and whispered, "Daddy, it's started again. Like before, with Rick and everybody. Daddy, please … *tell* them what *happened."*

As Alice spoke, Dr. Morris stood at the foot of her bed and watched her intently, chewing his lower lip. When she was finished, her dad looked at the doctor, who said to Alice quietly, "You've had a terrible shock." Then, to her father, he said, "This sort of outburst is often more dramatic than serious. Many women experience moments of mild hysteria in the first few months … even those who haven't

suffered a traumatic shock. It's really nothing to worry about."

Alice felt dizzy with confusion, and breathed, "Daddy …?" When he averted his eyes, she turned to Dr. Morris.

"You blacked out," the doctor said. "I wanted to do a full checkup."

"What? *Why?* What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," he said with a shrug. "You're pregnant."

A numbness overwhelmed Alice as she gaped at Dr. Morris.

He went on: "We're going to keep you here overnight. Just for observation … to make sure you're well and comfortable."

The doctor's last words were a muffled hum. Alice stared as if looking straight through him and mumbled to herself over and over again, "Pregnant … pregnant …"

Alice was ready to leave the hospital just before dawn the next morning. Yvonne breezed into her room and said, "You got everything you need?"

"Yeah."

"I've gotta start my rounds. I'll check up on you later. We can leave together when my shift's over."

As Yvonne started to leave, Alice called her name softly and she turned, smiling. "I don't feel anything," Alice whispered.

"What?"

"Well … I want to be happy about the baby … because it's *Dan's* baby … but I just feel sort of … *angry*. Angry that Dan's dead and angry that I traded him for this … this life that I don't even *know*. But that's all I feel. Anger. I can't seem to feel anything else."

Yvonne hesitated a moment, then said, "I think right now is a little too soon to be thinking about any of this. Am I right?"

Alice nodded half-heartedly.

"Look, I'll be *right* back when I'm done with my rounds. Why don't you get some rest."

"Yvonne?"

She stopped and turned in the doorway again.

"I told you about … about him. Freddy. And I'd like to tell everyone else. I *need* to. As soon as they'll let me out of here."

Yvonne looked around the room as if embarrassed, then said abruptly, "I've gotta start my rounds." She left the room quickly.

Alice sat on the edge of her bed, and with a sigh put her face in her hands. It was the same thing all over again … no one would believe her … they would think she was crazy … and the deaths would go on and on and on …

“Hi.”

She lifted her head with a gasp and saw a little boy standing in the open doorway. He was frail-looking, with an angelic quality about him. His skin was pale, almost translucent, and he wore a white hospital gown, which made him look sort of like a little ghost. But even more unsettling were his eyes: one was green, the other blue …

“Hello,” she said tentatively. They looked at one another for a long moment—she uncertain, and he with a gentle smile on his lips—before she spoke again. “Are you a patient here?”

“Yeah, I … guess so.”

“What’s your name?”

“Jacob.”

“Jacob. Well … that’s a nice name.” She waited for him to speak again; when he didn’t, she asked, “Should you be out of your room right now, Jacob?”

“Oh, I’m not that far away from it.”

“Would your mom want you in here?”

“I … don’t know,” he said, a little sadly. His eyebrows lifted and he said abruptly, “Your boyfriend died in a car wreck, huh?”

Alice flinched at his words. “How did you know that?”

“I’m sorry it happened. I just … wanted to see if you were all right.”

With that, he smiled bashfully and turned to leave.

“Wait, Jacob,” Alice called. “You don’t have to go …”

But he was gone …

• • •

As they left the hospital together later that morning, Alice asked Yvonne, “Hey, you know a little kid named Jacob? Maybe six or seven? He’s got … different-colored eyes.”

“Seven’s a little young for me,” Yvonne chuckled as they got into the elevator. “What about him?”

“He came to my room after you left this morning. He was in a hospital gown. I just wondered what was wrong with him.”

“Well, aside from the fact that there are no visitors allowed in the building between nine at night and nine in the morning, and that there’s no children’s wing in this hospital, absolutely nothing, far as I know.”

Alice frowned, confused. “You’re sure?”

“Positive.” The elevator stopped and opened and Yvonne said, “C’mon. Everybody’s waiting for us at the Crave Inn …”

When she was finished telling her story in the Crave Inn, Alice looked around the table from Yvonne to Greta to Mark, who squinted and said, in a somewhat embarrassed voice, "Look Alice, um … a guy out of your dreams did *not* kill Dan. It was an *accident."*

"Mark, this *isn't* something new," she said, trying to be patient. "Didn't you ever hear of what happened to my brother and my friends. Didn't *Dan* ever tell you about it?"

He shook his head. "He never wanted to talk about it."

The disbelief in the faces around the table frightened her; she'd expected it, but it frightened her nonetheless. "Look, you guys," she said, "I'm nor making this *up!* He gets in through me … through my *dreams.* I bring other people to him. It's something I thought I could control, something I could fight, but …" Her voice trailed off.

Greta said firmly, "Alice, when Dan had the accident, you weren't dreaming. You were *here.* At *work.* Am I right?"

Alice nodded reluctantly because that was the confusing part, the part she couldn't understand. It had *never* happened while she was awake before.

"So," Greta went on, "how did he—"

"There isn't any *how* or *he!"* Mark interrupted adamantly. He took Alice's hand and squeezed it affectionately, trying to hide the irritation in his voice. "You've been through a lot, Alice, we all know that. But don't let it get to you. Don't let it … *do* this to you."

Alice tried to hold back her tears of frustration and dread. They weren't believing her … and she was afraid for them …

Alice was in the kitchen pouring cream into a cup of coffee when her dad got home. He hugged two grocery bags to his chest and set them down on the kitchen table.

"Had your dinner yet?" he asked flatly.

She hesitated, unsure of his mood. "No. I was waiting for you to get home from your meeting."

"Get a spoon." He reached into one of the bags.

She took a spoon from the drawer and asked, "What's this?"

"Practice." He removed several jars of baby food from the bag.

She stared at them, a little confused at first, then very apprehensive.

"Don't worry," he said with a wink, something he hadn't done since she was a little girl, "you don't have to turn into Super Mom overnight. This hasn't exactly been the best weekend of your life. I just thought you'd like to … well, start with the peaches. They were always *your* favorite." He managed a slight smile, more than he

usually did, and looked away from her, embarrassed.

She felt a rush of love for him and stepped forward, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek. Then she opened a jar of mashed peaches and dug in …

Chapter 6

The day of Dan's funeral, Greta Gibson was miserable. Actually, *miserable* was too tame a word …

Her mother—who insisted that Greta call her by her first name, Racine, rather than "Mother" or "Mom"—was throwing one of her famous dinner parties. At least, they were famous among the circles of people who attended them, but they were not the kind of people with whom Greta preferred to associate. They were what she called "trendies," and she despised them. What she despised even more was the fact that her mother had been trying, for all of Greta's life, to turn her *into* one of them. True, it was Greta's ambition to be a fashion model; she looked forward with great excitement to posing for the cameras. But it was also true that a career as a model would require her to hang out with more trendies. Greta saw that as a severe drawback. Racine knew that and was trying to change her mind about the trendies, trying to groom her for the future.

Greta was seated at the opposite end of the table from Racine, hoping to avoid being noticed by any of her mother's friends. At the other end of the room Racine talked about Greta with a man dressed in an Italian suit; his sandy hair was ultrashort and he wore glasses with large, red, trendy frames. He nodded a lot and glanced from Racine to Greta and back again. He leaned toward Racine, murmured something, and she grinned, replying, "You know, you're *right.* People are *always* mistaking us for sisters."

Greta looked at her mother with distaste; the woman was a few years past forty and didn't look at *all* like Greta's sister. Greta looked around at the decor with equal distaste; she thought of it as "wanna-be Manhattan"—a lot of cold, artificial-looking Korean high-tech furniture—and she decided the guests matched it perfectly: cold and artificial.

The man at the end of the table—his name was Lorne and he was a sort of New Age past-life therapist—smiled at Greta and said, "You're not eating. Are you a vegetarian?"

"Greta's more of a *nothingatarian,"* Racine said. "You know, Greta, dear, you should at least try the monk fish. It's *imported."*

Greta resisted rolling her eyes in disgust. Racine was always harping on her to keep her figure—"For the cameras," she'd say—but, at the same time, she was always harping on her to *eat;* it made no sense.

A woman to Greta's left named Jody, whose clothes were a cross between Beverly Hills chic and Gypsy audacity, said, "You know, Greta *does* have the perfect body for modeling. In *fact* … I'm in New York quite often. I see Eileen Ford from time to time. I'd be happy to talk to her about you." She smiled at Greta, flashing capped teeth beneath an adjusted nose.

Greta smiled half-heartedly and looked down at her plate, toying with her food.

"Greta," Racine drawled, "Jody is offering you the chance of a *lifetime."* She turned to Jody and said, "All Greta *ever* talks about is making it in Manhattan."

The truth was, Greta seldom talked to her mother, because she never had anything to say that Racine wanted to hear; all *she* wanted to hear was trendy gossip about trendy people. Greta felt a surge of anger and let her fork clatter onto her plate as she said deliberately, "We buried one of my best friends today, *Mother."*

There was a flustered silence around the table; Lorne broke it by muttering, "The Jordan boy. A good ball player."

Racine said stiffly, "Rick Jordan was a—"

"Dan!" Greta interrupted. "Dan Jordan."

"He was a good friend of Greta's," Racine continued. "Not someone she was *seeing,* you understand. Just a friend."

A man who looked like someone in a yuppie beer commercial said, "It's reminiscent of Fitzgerald. Although, in *his* stories, it's generally the *women* who die violently."

"My God, I haven't read Fitzgerald in *ages,"* said a woman who looked like a department-store mannequin. "All I really remember about him is that everyone in his books is over the hill by the time they're nineteen. Is that right? I remember reading once that Fitzgerald …"

They were off again, having another trendy conversation about another trendy subject. Greta stared at her plate, feeling tired. She hadn't slept well since Dan's death—how *could* she, the way Alice was carrying on—but she suddenly felt unbearably tired. She closed her eyes … just for a moment … tuning out the droning voices around her … trying not to think about where she was … and—

—she jerked her head up suddenly, with a start.

Racine's face was inches from Greta's; she was standing beside Greta, leaning forward with a stern look on her face, hissing, "You've *got* to at least try the *fish.* Our guests will think there's something *wrong* with it!"

"Yes," Lorne prodded at the other end of the table, "come on. Have

a little."

To keep peace, Greta begrudgingly cut off a tiny piece of fish.

As if he were talking to a child, the yuppie beer-commercial man said, "Mmmm, *good.* See?" He popped a morsel into his mouth and chewed loudly.

Sickened by the man's patronizing attitude, Greta put her fork down.

Racine said, "Would you like me to have the caterer bring in something else?" She called over her shoulder, *"Frederick!"*

The name sent a chill down Greta's spine. She looked down at the table, taking in a deep breath as her mother took her plate away and another hand replaced it with a new one … a horribly scarred hand wearing a glove that had knives attached to the fingers. Greta sucked in a breath sharply and looked up, but—

—the kitchen door was already swinging closed and the caterer was gone. She looked down at the plate again; it was covered, with four piles of different kinds of … *mush.* Like baby food …

"Wittle Gweta gonna cwean her pwate for Mommy wike a good girl?" Racine cooed, scooping some of the mush into a spoon and lifting it to Greta's mouth.

Disgusted, Greta turned her head away and tried to lift a hand to push the spoon from her mouth, but she couldn't move either of her arms. She looked down and saw that—

—she was sitting in a filthy, rusted old high chair and her arms were held down beneath the dirty tray that covered her lap. Greta froze for a moment, thinking, *Wait a minute* … *wait* just *a minute!*

"C'mon, a big bite for Mommy," Racine said, pressing the spoon of goop to Greta's lips.

With little choice in the matter, Greta opened her mouth and took in the slop; some of it spattered on her chin.

Racine drawled, *"Therrrre's* Mommy's good girl," scooping up another spoonful of the stuff. She shoved it hard into Greta's mouth before Greta could resist, then scooped up another. She pushed spoonful after spoonful into Greta's mouth, pressing the spoon to the roof of her mouth before slipping it out and dribbling the goop on her chin. Bits of it clung to Greta's face as she struggled in the high chair, trying to cry out but unable to make anything more than a gargling sound. Glops of the slimy substance slapped onto Greta's dress and splashed on her arms. She thought she could almost feel it caking on her, growing dry and crusty. All the while the trendies seated around the table smiled and nodded; some of them even broke into quiet applause now and then.

Greta jerked her head back and forth and finally spat out a mouthful of the goop, clenching her eyes shut and trying to speak, to protest, but when she opened her eyes she gasped, because—

—a wiry man with horribly burned skin, wearing a tattered hat and an old red and green sweater, stood before her. He lifted a hand and—

—it was *the* hand … the razor-clawed hand she'd seen a few moments ago … the hand Alice had spoken of … and the man grinned as—

—he moved the hand toward her face so she could see what he held delicately between his thumb and forefinger. It was a tiny, miniature version of herself, squirming and crying out in agony and fear.

"You are what you eat," he chuckled, using his other hand to force her mouth open.

Greta tried to scream, tried to call for her mother—even for Alice—but nothing came from her mouth except little gobules of the mush her mother had been feeding her. She struggled, trying to fight his iron grip, but it was useless.

He pried her mouth open, held the tiny creature—*Me!* she thought frantically; *that's meeee!*—and plopped it onto her tongue, then pressed her jaw up until her teeth clacked together.

She felt the miniature version of herself squirming in her clamped mouth, and tried to lower her jaw again, but Freddy's grip was too strong. The thing in her mouth crawled backward down her tongue, squirming, wriggling, until—

—it slid down her throat and—

—then it stopped.

She tried to take in a breath but could not; she tried to exhale but could not. It was lodged in her throat, writhing … kicking and scratching … crying out in a needle-thin voice.

The guests at the table smiled wider … laughed louder … applauded harder …

… and Greta strangled …

The baby food wasn't bad … it wasn't bad at all.

Alice opened a third jar, and as she twisted the jar's lid—

—it made a muffled burping sound and yellow, vomitous mush slapped onto the wall before her. She stared at it as it oozed down the wall … slowly … then she realized that—

—the baby food was not dribbling toward the floor but moving with purpose over the wall … taking *shape* … forming a set of long vertical lips, like a mouth, except—

—it *wasn't* a mouth because the lips split, forming several flowery delicate folds that opened, and—

—Greta's head and shoulders oozed from between them as she screamed, "Alice! *Help meee!"* She reached out a hand as the lips began to close around her again, sucking her back in with horrible slurping sounds.

Alice lunged forward and grabbed Greta's arms, pulling with all her might, but they were slippery and she quickly lost her grip. Instead, she reached forward and wrapped her fingers around the fleshy lips and tried to pry them apart, pulling harder and harder, until—

—they finally gave and opened up, but before Alice could grab hold of her, Greta fell away from her, screaming as she disappeared down the long membranous tunnel in which she'd seen Dan fall only days ago. Holding the enormous lips open, Alice screamed, "Greta! Greta, I'm *sorry!* Gre—"

The lips slapped shut and disappeared.

Alice stood in the kitchen a moment, then spun around and screamed for her dad, but she could hear the shower hissing upstairs, and turned instead to the telephone, grabbed the receiver and began punching in Greta's number. But before she was finished—

—her insides were seized by a sharp pain that tightened its grip until she dropped the receiver and lurched forward, leaning against the wall. She fell to her knees, cried out and then—

—it was gone.

She leaned back against the cupboards with a quavering sigh and breathed, "Dear God, what's happening …?"

Chapter 7

Mark heard someone coming up the stairs to his room and quickly lifted a comic book in front of his face. He'd been lying on his bed crying softly for over an hour.

How could it happen? he'd asked himself again and again. *With all those people at the table—how could it happen?*

He'd heard about Greta's death that morning, and had been devastated. He'd stayed in his room all day.

Mark's room was actually the attic that he'd converted into a sort of studio apartment. It was cluttered with his enormous comic-book collection, and above his drawing table he'd built a platform bed for his king-sized mattress, with a rickety ladder leading up from the floor. The whole thing was precariously nailed together but, for all its creaking and wobbling, it seemed sturdy enough.

There was a knock at the door and Alice called, "Mark? You all right?"

"Sure," he said, quickly wiping his eyes. "C'mon in."

She came in, followed by Yvonne in her nurse's uniform.

"You mind if we stick around for a while?" Yvonne asked.

"If you want." He did not take his eyes from the comic book; he was afraid to look at them, afraid they'd know.

The bed creaked and jittered as they climbed up the ladder and sat down beside him.

"You know," Yvonne said, "someday this whole thing's gonna fall flat. You oughtta nail it together better."

He shrugged, still staring blindly at the comic book. They were silent for the longest time. It was a silence filled with the unspoken but deafening grief they all felt.

Finally, Alice whispered, "She must've fallen asleep at the table. That's the only explanation I can …"

As her voice trailed off, Mark finally looked up from his comic book and glared at her, waiting, just *waiting* for her to mention one word about that stupid nightmare story of hers.

"But," she went on, "I still don't know why this is happening while I'm *awake.* I've got to figure out how he's getting in!"

Mark threw his comic book against the wall and snapped, "I really don't need to hear this shit now, okay?"

“But it’s *true,* Mark,” she hissed. “I have *one* dream about Krueger, and a few days later two of us are *dead!”*

“Alice, will you juh-just … just *shut up!”* Mark shouted, clenching his fists. She was startled by his outburst. He looked at her and continued quietly. “I loved Greta. I … I knew I never stood a chance in hell with her, but I *loved* her, and I’m having … you know, um—” He fought back his tears, sickened by them. “I’m having a hard enough time dealing with the fact that she choked to death on a fucking piece of *fish!* I don’t need to hear your bullshit about some asshole from dreamland. I … I just … wanna be left alone. Okay?”

Alice reached out tentatively and squeezed his shoulder, nodding, then she and Yvonne climbed carefully down the ladder.

Mark lifted the comic book again and tried to at least look at the pictures, but his eyes blurred with tears. He felt sick inside, knotted up, and … he *didn’t* want to be alone. He sat up quickly and said, “Hey, um … would you guys mind … y’know, just … hanging around for a while? We wouldn’t have to talk, if you don’t want to.”

“I’ve gotta go to work,’Yvonne said apologetically.

Alice smiled. “I’ll stay …”

A few hours later—hours of talking about Greta and their times together—Mark sat down at his drawing table and Alice looked over his shoulder as he paged through a book he’d been preparing for Greta. It was filled with drawings of all of them: Mark, Greta, Yvonne, Alice, and Dan …

“I was going to finish it up … ‘Our Senior Year Adventures,’ something like that, and … well, I wanted to give it to her before she went to New York, but …”

“She would’ve liked that,” Alice whispered. “It’s very good. Really.”

He closed the book gently, set it down beside a drawing of his own house and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands, then smiled up at Alice and said, “So. Pregnant, huh?”

“Yeah. And having a little trouble getting used to the idea.”

“Well … I think it’s great. I kinda think that … well, y’know, Dan would’ve liked *that* too.”

Alice stifled a yawn and stretched her arms above her head.

“Tired?” Mark asked. “My dad’s usually got some coffee in the pot by now.”

“I’ll go get us some,” Alice said, heading for the door. “Be right back.”

Mark watched her go, glad that he’d asked her to stay. He felt pretty

tired himself. Not actually *sleepy,* but like he needed to lie down. He took off his shoes and socks, climbed onto his bed and curled up … just for a few minutes … until Alice got back …

A few minutes later Alice climbed the stairs with two steaming cups of coffee and entered Mark's room, saying, "Here it is, piping hot and good to the last drop." She looked around, but could find Mark nowhere. She called his name a couple of times, turning around and around, searching the room for him.

Mark was gone.

She set the coffee cups down on his drawing table and gasped when she saw that—

—the drawing of Mark's house was *moving!* The house was decomposing, coming to pieces, then reforming into a picture of *another* house … an old, rundown boarded-up house …

Freddy's house.

On the porch lay a typical Welcome mat, but from the mat rose tiny rusted-metal spikes that looked sharp as needles.

As if being sketched rapidly by an invisible hand and pen, a figure appeared before the house. Mark …

"Dammit, Krueger, *no!"* she shouted.

In the picture Mark stood before the house looking around in confusion, then started to step toward the door, toward the mat …

"No, Mark, don't!" Alice cried, stepping away from the table and shutting her eyes tightly, concentrating on Mark and the Krueger house with every ounce of her strength, until—

—the air around her seemed to be sucked out of the room with a deafening *whoosh!* and, a heartbeat later, Alice was sucked out with it, pulled backward so hard and fast that her hair slapped around her head and her arms and legs flew forward, until—

—she was standing a few feet behind Mark in front of the ominous gray house, and he was about to step onto the spiked Welcome mat in his bare feet as—

—she threw herself forward, shouting, *"Don't,* Mark!" but—

—it was too late.

Mark's foot pressed down on the mat and blood began to pool immediately between the small rusted spikes. Mark froze with his other foot held inches above the mat, looked down, confused, then whimpered, "Ow …" As if he did not yet understand the source of the pain, Mark put his other foot down, then reached for the doorknob.

Alice clutched his shoulder and said, "Mark … Mark, do you *hear*

me? Wake up!”

He looked at her as if she were a stranger and blinked several times. “Alice?” he said finally looking around with growing shock at his surroundings.

“Wake *up,* Mark, wake up *now,* before he comes!”

“Before … *who* comes?”

“Freddy!”

“Alice,” he whispered as his eyes narrowed in pain, “my feet … my *feet,* Alice …” He looked down slowly and—

—then he was gone in a vaporous puff.

Relieved, Alice faced the house and, burning with anger, growled, “All right, Krueger, you son of a *bitch!”* She stepped over the mat, threw the door open and stalked into the house. “You stay *away* from me, Krueger!” she shouted as she went down the hall, throwing doors open and checking each room for a sign of Freddy’s presence. She went upstairs to continue her search. “Stay out of my *life!* Leave my friends *alone!”* She burst into a musty old bedroom, found nothing, then into another room, finding only cobwebs and covered furniture.

Beyond the door at the end of the hall, she found a steep narrow staircase. It was treacherously dark, but she climbed the creaky stairs to the attic above and opened the door. Plumes of dust rose into the air like a mist, dancing in the beam of light that shined in through a broken window.

“Where are you, Freddy?” she said quietly; the tears in her eyes did not help her to sound very convincing when she declared, “I’m not afraid of you. Not *anymore!”*

The skittering of a rat in a dark corner was the only response …

Deciding it was pointless to go on searching, Alice turned and—

—Jacob said, “Hi.”

She gasped and staggered backward, slapping a hand over her pounding chest. “You *scared* me, Jacob. What … What’re you doing here?”

“Dan would’ve wanted me to be with you.” He stood in the doorway, still wearing his hospital gown, still pale, and looking even more sickly than he had before.

“You knew Dan?” Alice asked suspiciously.

“Kind of …”

“Does your mom know you’re here?”

“My mom’s too busy to care where I am.”

Alice knelt down before him and whispered, “Oh, I’m sure she cares.”

"It doesn't matter. I've got a *new* friend now. He knows all *kindsa* neat games …"

Alice ignored his words; she was too full of questions about this odd child. She finally asked, "Who *are* you, Jacob?"

He smiled again. "I'm sorry about your friend Greta."

"How did you know about *that?"*

Again he ignored her question, turning with childlike preoccupation to look down the stairs behind him. "Hey … he's gone. My friend's gone." Without so much as a glance back at Alice, the boy hurried down the stairs and disappeared into the hungry darkness.

"Jacob!" she called, following him. "You shouldn't be alone in here, Jacob! Jacob? Where are you go—"

The dark attic stairway was gone and Alice stood before Mark's drawing table. There was a loud creaking sound above her, and she looked up with a gasp as—

—Mark sat up in his bed and looked down at her with confused and sleepy eyes. He swung his legs off the bed; his feet were bleeding from small puncture wounds.

"How could it have happened?" Alice breathed, talking to herself as she paced. "I was *awake!* How could it … he was *there,* in the house. I *know* he was. But then … where did he go? Why didn't he come for us? And why was *Jacob* there?"

"My feet," Mark whispered, examining his injuries. He looked down at her with confusion and fear. "Alice … my *feet.* It was … *real.* I thought I was dreaming, but … Alice? Maybe you oughtta tell me a little more about this …"

Chapter 8

When Yvonne's shift ended early the next morning, she went straight to the university locker room and changed from her uniform into a bikini. It had been a rough night and she was looking forward to a long rest in the steam room, then a few laps around the pool.

In the steam room she sat with her back to the wall, hugging one leg to her breasts. She needed some time alone, away from work and even her friends; she'd been so busy lately, she'd had no time to just relax and think a while … about Dan … about Greta …

The hot steam massaged her stiff muscles … loosened them … relieved their aches … wrapped her in a blanket of clinging warmth …

She leaned her head back, closed her eyes, and—

—sat up with a gasp, drenched with perspiration. "Damn," she hissed, chiding herself for falling asleep; she couldn't afford to spend the whole *morning* in the steam room.

Yvonne stood and left the room, went to the pool and climbed up to the diving board. Still feeling groggy, she stopped to rub her eyes before walking out onto the board, and—

—the diving board lurched suddenly, nearly knocking her over the side to the concrete thirty feet below. She clutched the railing and screamed as—

—the board began to shake violently and the metal girders that supported it groaned loudly as if under a tremendous strain. Yvonne leaned against the railing, hugging it desperately, and looked over the side as—

—the girders beneath her began to wilt slowly, as if they were melting. They swayed this way … that way … then began to move faster, whipping the board back and forth. She clutched the railing even harder, until—

—it snapped off in her arms like a frail piece of plastic, and—

—Yvonne pressed herself flat against the board, facedown, hugging it for life, when—

—the board itself began to break up, cracking loudly and separating into four long narrow sections which spread apart slowly … farther and farther apart … like … like four enormous *fingers* …

“Nooo!” Yvonne screamed, so loudly that her throat hurt. “This cuh-can’t buh-be *happening!”*

Giant curved knives sprang from the ends of the four sections as they curled slowly around her.

Yvonne looked over her shoulder as—

—one of the girders shot upward from the back of the board and bent, as if jointed … like a *thumb* …

“No, please, God, *nooo!”* she screamed, closing her eyes as the hand closed slowly. “Somebody help me! Plee-heeze, somebody—”

The platform gave a tremendous jerk and Yvonne suddenly sensed movement … *upward* movement … She opened her eyes to see that—

—the diving board—or what had once *been* a diving board—was shooting up at an incredible speed. The pool was growing smaller and more distant beneath her and, when she looked up, the ceiling was growing rapidly closer, and—

—Yvonne, realizing she was about to be crushed like a fly against the ceiling, scrambled desperately toward the edge of the giant hand that held her, throwing herself off and falling down toward the pool, falling faster and faster, and she screamed when she saw that—

—the pool was *empty*. She was plummeting toward the light blue concrete floor of the pool, faster and faster, and as she fell, screaming, she saw something very strange …

In the middle of the pool floor, the concrete surface was shifting … forming rounded ridges that somehow resembled … *lips*. The lips separated into an oval-shaped opening that led to an endless tunnel with glistening pink walls that seemed to pulse.

Yvonne fell farther and farther, as if she would *never* land, and as she stared down at what she was certain would be her death—

—the opening in the pool exploded with a thick, black-red liquid that gushed upward like a geyser, spraying into the air and covering the light blue floor, rising quickly until it was sloshing against the pool walls, nearly filling it. Blood … the pool was filling with *blood* …

The black-red surface flew up at Yvonne with lightning speed, and she fell into the pool of blood with a thick splash. She began kicking and flailing her arms, trying to keep her head above the surface so she could breathe. Her hair pressed slickly to her face as she struggled, but her efforts were doing very little, if any, good because—

—below her she felt a powerful swirl in the pool and realized that, all around her, the level of blood against the pool walls was lowering …

The strange opening in the bottom of the pool had stopped gushing blood; it was now sucking the blood back out again. Yvonne felt

herself being pulled toward the center of the pool and sucked under the viscous, lumpy surface of blood. She fought harder, sweeping her arms at her sides frantically, trying to steer herself to the pool's edge. In spite of the tremendous pull beneath her, she managed to inch her way to the side of the pool … closer … a little closer, until—

—she was close enough to reach out and slap her hands onto the concrete. She clutched the lip that surrounded the pool and began pulling with all her strength to lift herself out of the mire, when—

—two feet appeared before her.

Above the viscous slurping sounds that came from the pool, Yvonne heard a sinister laugh as—

—Freddy hunkered down in front of her, propped an elbow on his knee and clanged his blades together as he said, "Careful … there's an *undertow!"*

"No!" she cried. "Please help me! Please, *help meee!"*

He reached out his right arm and delicately scraped his blades over the back of her left hand, laughing.

The stinging pain made her scream, and when she saw the blood—her *own* blood—Yvonne lost her grip and—

—sat up in the steam room with a little cry, froze, and looked around her. When she realized that she'd fallen asleep and dreamed it all, she relaxed with a loud sigh and scrubbed her face with her moist palms. But her relief was short-lived. A chill crept over her in spite of the steam room's heat, and she whispered, "Oh, my God …"

It's true, she thought. *Everything Alice said is true …*

Chapter 9

"He was just like you said," Yvonne whispered over the counter to Alice that afternoon in the Crave Inn. "He was horribly burned, and he had those awful knives on his hand. And"—she extended her left arm, pulled back the bandage on her hand and showed Alice the cuts—"he did this."

Alice stared at the cuts with a sinking feeling in her stomach and said, "I'm glad that's *all* he did. You're lucky to be alive. I just don't understand how he's getting in when I'm *awake …"*

"He'd trick you into pulling friends into your dreams while you slept, then … he'd kill them. Right?"

"Right. But now he's getting to them while I'm *awake.* First Dan, then Greta … he almost got Mark, then you … next, he's liable to come after me while I'm awake. Me and … and my baby," she breathed. A frightening thought hit her hard and she covered her mouth with a palm. "Oh, my God. Yvonne, do … do unborn babies dream?"

Yvonne's eyes widened with stunned realization. "Yeah … they do. About three fourths of their lives in the womb."

Alice swept a hand through her hair, chewing her lip, and asked, "Can you reach Dr. Morris?"

"Well, it's Sunday … I can try him at home."

Taking off her apron, Alice said, "If Freddy's gotten into the baby's dreams, he could be doing something to … to *my baby …"*

Yvonne smiled slightly. *"Your* baby? The baby you don't feel anything for?"

Alice smiled, too, realizing that she did, indeed, feel something for the baby; she felt a great deal. "I just want to know right away … all right? If that's what Freddy's doing, maybe we can stop him …"

"From the tone of your voice, Yvonne," Dr. Morris said, seated on the corner of his desktop and frowning with irritation, "I expected some kind of emergency. But I don't see anything about Alice that would make ultrasound necessary this early in the pregnancy. And it *certainly* isn't necessary on Sunday afternoon."

Alice said, "I want to make sure my baby's all right."

Dr. Morris sighed and rolled his eyes. "Listen, Alice, I can assure

you that—"

"Do unborn babies dream, Dr. Morris?" she asked, interrupting him.

In a flat annoyed voice the doctor replied, "Approximately seventy-eight percent of their day. There's even been some research supporting the concept of a dream link between the child and mother … a sort of psychic umbilical cord."

"I don't understand …"

"Well, there may be times when a mother is actually able to *experience* her unborn baby's dreams." He frowned again, looking back and forth between Yvonne and Alice. "Is *that* why you interrupted my tennis game? Because you're afraid your baby's having *nightmares?"*

"We're here to find out everything we can, Doctor."

Yvonne said, "And the thing of it is, we're kind of in a hurry, so maybe you could give Alice the test first and yell at us later?"

He stood. "Well, now that my afternoon's ruined *anyway,* I might as well …"

Mark was exhausted; he'd been guzzling coffee all day, and as a result he had a headache and his hands were trembling. He hadn't slept last night—hadn't *allowed* himself to sleep—now that he knew his dreams were dangerous.

To keep himself occupied, he'd been working furiously, drawing a single picture over and over again, each time from a different angle: the house he'd seen in his dream with the rusty, spiked Welcome mat before the door.

He began to nod sleepily over his work, and sat up with a jerk, yawning, then sipping his coffee. As he set his cup down again, he noticed a comic book on his table that he hadn't seen before. He picked it up and read the title written in red dripping letters on the cover: KRUEGER'S NIGHTMARES FROM HELL. Curious, he opened it at random and gasped when he saw—

—a drawing of Greta in an enormous high chair, her white, bloated face covered with dribbling lumps of food. Horrified, Mark flipped through the comic book and saw—

—a drawing of Dan in the clutches of a motorcycle with hideous human features, and—

—Yvonne diving into an empty swimming pool with an enormous vaginal-like opening in the bottom, and—

—*himself.* The drawing depicted Mark at his drawing table reading a comic book; it was followed by several blank panels. He took in a breath and whispered, "Oh, my Guh—"

—a terribly scarred hand tore out of the comic book's pages and slapped onto Mark's face, the fingers digging into his flesh, and as Mark screamed—

—the hand pulled with tremendous strength, ripping Mark from his chair and—

—*into the comic book!*

He was tossed through the air and back into his own room, except … it wasn't *really* his room. It was a two-dimensional *illustration* of his room, drawn in the exaggerated perspective of a comic book. He hit the floor hard and landed against his drawing table, which ripped like paper. It *was* paper, a drawing rather than an actual, tangible piece of furniture.

He heard an ominous ripping sound and, sprawled on the floor, looked up to see that—

—four blades were cutting through the paper wall. Evil eyes peered through the cuts, and Mark heard a laugh. Scrambling to his feet, Mark ran to the door, but—

—he couldn't turn the knob because there was nothing to *turn,* nothing to grab hold of … it was just a drawing …

Behind him Freddy's knives continued to slice the paper … then he stepped into the room and laughed uproariously …

Lying on her back, Alice watched the ultrasound screen, enchanted as she listened to the sound of her baby's heartbeat.

"We're still very early along in development," Dr. Morris muttered, mostly to himself. "Everything seems fine … heartbeat's strong …"

The rhythmic sound was almost hypnotic … *magical* … and Alice found herself smiling as she looked at the screen, riveted, until—

—she heard another sound, a frightening sound that seemed to come from within her own head … the sound of ripping paper …

With a start, she looked around her for the source of the sound, but saw nothing unusual. She returned her attention to the screen and, for the moment, decided to ignore it …

Mark ran to the nearest window, but it would not open.

"Faster than a head-on collision!" Freddy roared.

As Mark clawed at the window, searching for a hold, he saw movement outside. A comic book version of a semi and Dan's red truck were headed straight for one another at high speed. When they collided, the word CRASH! appeared in a jagged bubble in the air above them.

“No!” Mark cried, covering his eyes with his hands.

Behind him Freddy shouted, “Deader than your darling Greta!”

When Mark lowered his hands, the window was gone, replaced by a vivid drawing of Greta in an old, decayed high chair, her skin rotting, her eyes gone from their sockets, her mouth hanging open and filled with mush.

Mark screamed and spun around as—

—Freddy laughed. “Able to shred stupid little boys into *bits* and *pieces?”* He lifted his deadly claw high above Mark …

“Everything’s fine,” Dr. Morris said half-heartedly, apparently preoccupied with the tennis game he was missing. He turned to Yvonne and said, “I’d like to have a word with you in my office.” Without waiting for a response, he left the room. Yvonne turned to Alice, shrugged, and followed him out.

Alice lay on the bed and stared at the ceiling, wondering if perhaps the ultrasound would not detect any damage Freddy might cause, when—

—the ceiling disappeared as she heard Mark screaming, *“Aaaaliiiiice!”* and she saw a frightening comic-book illustration of him in his room, his eyes wide with horror as—

—Freddy brought his claws down and sliced through the drawing of Mark. They cut him as if he were paper—he *was* paper—and the shreds fluttered to the floor in a pool of bright red ink …

“No!” Alice shouted, sitting up and swinging her legs off the bed as —

—the wall before her began to pulsate, ribbed with veins, and the vertical lips appeared once again, opening to reveal the long pink tunnel that glistened with dribbling juices, and—

—without warning, Alice was sucked off the bed and pulled headlong into the opening.

She tumbled head over heels down the twisting tunnel until she was swept into an enormous, cavernous opening with viscous walls lined with pulsing veins. She lost some speed and moved slower as she tumbled between arteries and organs … she recognized them *immediately* … they looked like the illustrations from her biology textbooks … but she didn’t *understand* them. Human organs hung over her like giant stars in a night sky.

Alice floated slowly into a beam of glowing light and turned around to see—

—a giant fetus, its knees curled up beneath its chin. Her eyes widened as she thought, *My baby … I’m inside* myself!

The fetus bobbed slightly, its umbilical cord curling from its belly, and turned toward her. Alice watched with wide-eyed fascination, smiling, until—

—the belly of the fetus began to move, bulge, and the bulges took on human facial features. Alice gaped in horror as the features took on more definition and she recognized—

—Dan and Greta!

Alice's scream echoed off the pink fleshy uterine walls around her as the faces yawned silently, their eyes pleading for help, for release …

She heard another scream meld with her own. It, too, echoed, growing closer and closer behind her. She turned to see a blob of light glowing a soft electric blue, plummeting toward her, and she ducked, looking up to see Mark's face in the light, his mouth gaping as he shot toward the fetus, hitting its belly and disappearing in a burst of light.

No! Alice thought. *He got Mark … that bastard got Mark …*

The uterine wall behind the fetus began to bulge and undulate … facial features began to protrude from the glistening pink surface, until—

—Freddy was grinning at her, laughing. "Like father … like *son …"*

"No!" Alice screamed. "You're *not* my baby's *father!"* and—

—Dr. Morris leaned over her, frowning, and said, "Of course I'm not."

Alice blinked, sat up and looked around at the ultrasound equipment, sputtering, "Muh-My baby! What did he duh-to my buh-baby?"

"There's absolutely nothing wrong with your baby," Dr. Morris said. "He's a perfectly healthy child. A little big for so early on, but as active and normal as any baby I've ever seen."

Alice turned to Yvonne and hissed, "He's feeding the souls to the baby! I saw it … *all* of it! And … he got Mark. *I saw his soul!"*

Yvonne stepped forward quickly and said, "I'm sorry, Dr. Morris, she's been having such a tough time since Dan died. I thought it might help. I'll take her home. I'm really sorry we dragged you down here."

Alice sat up and clutched Yvonne's shoulders. "He's taking their *souls!* He's *feeding* them to my *baby!"*

Glancing at Dr. Morris apologetically, Yvonne said, "I'll take her home. It'll all look different after she gets some sleep."

Alice stood and Yvonne put an arm around her, leading her out …

When they were gone, Dr. Morris went into his office, picked up the phone and dialed the Jordans' number, waiting for an answer. "Hello,

Mrs. Jordan? This is Dr. Morris. I'm terribly sorry to call on a Sunday but … well, I think this is rather important. It's about Alice Johnson …"

Chapter 10

"I promise he won't get to you, Yvonne," Alice said as Yvonne parked her car in front of Alice's house. "He got to Mark, but I won't *let* him get to you."

"If he's getting in through your baby," Yvonne said as they went up to the walk to the front door, "how are you going to stop him?"

"I don't know. I'm still putting the pieces together. There's a woman I've been seeing in my dreams, a nun … there's something I'm missing." She opened the front door and they went inside. "You worry about staying *awake* … I'll worry about Freddy."

Alice led Yvonne into the living room and they froze because—

—Mr. and Mrs. Jordan were sitting with Alice's dad, staring at her solemnly. Alice smiled and said, "Oh … hi."

"Sit down, Alice," Mrs. Jordan said. "We have something to say to you."

Alice hesitated, sensing that something was up. She glanced at her father; he looked serious, but averted his eyes.

"I should be getting home," Yvonne whispered.

"Remember what I told you," Alice said. *"Stay awake!"*

After Yvonne left, Alice seated herself and faced the Jordans. Mrs. Jordan looked at her with a tight, pinched expression and said prissily, "We'd like to ask you … *dear* … exactly what you intend to do with your baby."

"What I intend to *do,* Mrs. Jordan?" Alice asked.

"Well, you can't very well raise a child on what you make at that *diner,* can you?"

Mrs. Jordan nodded and looked at her husband; he turned away. She said, "I'm afraid we're going to have to ask you for custody of the child."

"What? He's *my* child!"

"Yours and Dan's. *Our* grandchild. We have rights here, too, you know. In your present condition, Alice, you're hardly a fit mother."

"Condition? What condition? I don't have a *condition!"*

"We had a call from Dr. Morris. He said you were in his office earlier today, nearly hysterical. He said you were having paranoid delusions … hallucinations …"

"Wait, you don't understand, I was—"

“You’ve been through a *lot,* Alice,” Mrs. Jordan said firmly. “But a child’s welfare is at stake.”

“Look,” Alice said with equal firmness, “there’s no *way* I’m gonna let you take my baby.”

Mrs. Jordan gave her a small, cold smile. “There’s no court in the country that would let you keep the child.”

Alice stood, shocked that this woman would say such a thing to her. She turned to her dad and asked, “What do *you* say, Daddy?”

He turned to her slowly, frowned, and looked at Mrs. Jordan for a moment, then said, very calmly, “Well, I think you’d make a hell of a better mother than *this* raving bitch.”

Relieved, Alice stifled a giggle.

Mrs. Jordan turned to Alice’s dad and snapped, “You have *no* right to talk to me like that.”

“But you’ve got a right to walk in here and talk to my daughter any way you please?” he snapped back, standing. “I’m gonna have to ask you to leave. Personally, I’d rather *bodily* remove you … but I’ll control myself and *ask* you to leave.”

Glaring at him, Mrs. Jordan stood and said, “You’ll hear from our attorneys.” She stalked out of the house.

Mr. Jordan stood too. “I’m sorry, Alice,” he said, then turned to her dad. “It’s just that … our grandchild is all we have left of Dan.”

“I understand,” Mr. Johnson said, slapping Jordan on the back. “Remember … I lost *my* son too.” After Mr. Jordan followed his wife out of the house, Alice’s dad turned to her and said ominously, “I swear to God, I’ve never wanted a drink so badly in all my *life.”* Then he smiled slowly and took her in his arms.

Although she was off duty, Yvonne was wearing her uniform as she entered the pharmaceutical room, glancing over her shoulder to make sure no one was watching. Using the key she’d sneaked away from the nurse’s desk, she opened the cabinet that held the hospital’s narcotics and searched the shelves frantically. When she found what she wanted —a *powerful* sleeping pill—she grabbed the bottle, shook two pills into her hand, replaced it, and closed the cabinet. She left the room and, walking casually, replaced the key on its hook at the nurse’s desk. Popping the pills into her mouth, she went to the drinking fountain in the corridor and drank them down, then went to a room that she knew would be empty for the rest of the day. Lying down on the bed, she braced herself for whatever might come and closed her eyes …

Alice was sickened by what she saw.

She sat in the Springwood Public Library, watching as microfilm newspaper articles passed before her on the screen, chronicling the lives—and *deaths*—of Fred Krueger's victims. She wasn't sure exactly what she was looking for, but she was certain she'd know it when it came.

It finally did: KILLER KRUEGER'S MOTHER DIES MYSTERIOUSLY.

Alice froze on a photograph of a nun in a white habit—the same nun she'd seen in her waking-dream the evening Dan died—and the caption below read: *Sister Mary Helena (Amanda Krueger)—Was it Suicide?*

"Found you, lady," Alice said to herself, attracting a few annoyed glares from the readers around her. She pulled in on the woman in the picture, placed both hands flat on the table before her, and began to concentrate hard, her forehead breaking out with beads of perspiration, as she stared at Amanda Krueger intensely, until—

—the air was sucked away from around her as it had been in Mark's room and she shot backward, passing through some invisible hole in reality, until—

—she was standing before the same Gothic stone building she'd seen in Springwood Park in her waking-dream days, in front of … the building in which Alice had watched Fred Krueger's birth …

There was no one around, so Alice entered, calling "Amanda! Amanda Krueger? Aman—um, Sister Mary Helena! Are you here? Hello?" She hurried down a long cold corridor, determined to find the woman who'd spoken to her … the woman who had frightened Freddy Krueger …

The corridor seemed endless, and although she called out again and again, she got no response. She stopped in the corridor, looking all around her, spinning to see—

—"Jacob!" she cried, surprised to see the boy standing a few yards behind her beneath a stone archway. He was not facing her and did not turn when she spoke; he was looking up at someone else … someone standing out of sight, behind the edge of the archway. "Ja—*Jacob?"*

He turned to her then, as if startled, looking almost *guilty,* and he staggered suddenly against the archway.

"Jacob!" Alice shouted as she rushed toward him. It was suddenly no longer important that she find Amanda Krueger … *nothing* seemed as important as helping that pale little boy … He fell into her arms when she reached him, looking into her eyes wearily. "Jacob, are you all *right?"*

He was perspiring, feverish, and he no longer looked simply pale and ill … his face was definitely *different* …

Jacob's nose was thinner, longer … his mouth seemed smaller, his lips seemed to have taken on a half-hearted sneer. His face had taken on very familiar—*frighteningly* familiar—characteristics …

Jacob was beginning to resemble Freddy Krueger.

He smiled pathetically, and with a dreamy look in his eyes, began to sing: "One, two … Freddy's coming for you … three, four … better lock the door … five, six …"

Alice gasped, listening as Jacob sang on and on, his drunken smile never wavering. "Where did you learn that song?" she asked breathlessly.

"My … friend … taught me …" He began singing again: "One, two … Freddy's coming for you …"

Alice shook him. "Jacob, your friend, who—*Jacob?*—who *is* he? What does he *look* like? Jacob?"

As the boy went on singing, another voice—a woman's voice—spoke up behind Alice: *"You* know what he looks like."

Alice spun around to see Amanda Krueger in her white nun's habit.

"And you know what he wants," Amanda went on. "He wants to make your child his own."

Alice nodded as if she'd known all along; deep down inside, she was sure she had. "How do I stop him?" she asked.

"It may be too late."

"What do you mean?"

"Your friend Yvonne thinks she can fight your battles for you."

Alice stared at her a moment in mute horror, then: "She's fallen *asleep?"*

Amanda nodded, looking sad … resigned.

Alice turned to Jacob, but—

—he was gone. When she called his name, Amanda whispered, "He's losing the battle."

Looking at the empty space where Jacob had been only moments ago, Alice whispered, "Jacob?" thinking, *My son?*

"It takes a *mother's* love," Amanda whispered.

Alice screamed, *"How do I stop your son?"*

"There isn't much time. Look how ill the child is already." She pointed down the corridor behind Alice, who spun around and gasped as—

—Jacob staggered around a corner and disappeared.

Alice tore after him, racing around the corner and down the

intersecting corridor, as Jacob rounded still another corner … and another … another and another … until—

—Alice rounded a corner and, instead of Jacob, she saw Amanda ahead of her, walking toward another corridor.

“Wait!” Alice called. “You have to help me!”

“I can’t help you here,” Amanda’s voice echoed back coldly.

Alice doubled her fists and screamed, “I’m not gonna let him win! I’ll stop him with or without you!”

Amanda disappeared.

As Alice stood in the deserted corridor, determination burning in her eyes, she saw the wall ahead of her begin to pulse … change color … throb with veins … grow long vertical lips that opened into a glistening pink tunnel …

Alice took a deep breath and ran for the opening, picking up speed as she neared the wall, and finally plunged between the lips, landing firmly on her feet in—

—Freddy’s boiler room. *This isn’t good,* she thought as she looked around, gasping when she saw—

—Freddy. But she couldn’t see *all* of him. From the chest up he was perfectly visible, but below that there was *nothing,* as if he were poking his head out of thin air. Around him the air quavered like the surface of a smooth pond being disturbed.

“Welcome to Freddyland!” he quipped.

“What’re you doing, Krueger? What’re you doing to my *son?* To my *friends? Where’s Yvonne?”*

Freddy’s arm appeared suddenly, from *nowhere,* and his fist was closed tight on a clump of Yvonne’s hair, lifting her head from the pool of thin air. Her face and hair were wet and she shook her head, gasping as if she’d been held underwater … then he shoved her back into nothingness.

“Whatsa *matter,* Alice?” Freddy growled. “Running out of *friends* again?”

She tried to control herself, tried not to become emotional; instead, she held onto her anger and said, “It’s not that easy anymore, Krueger.” Her forehead creased as she concentrated on Krueger and on her anger, until—

—the invisible vertical pool became a wall of flames that engulfed Freddy. He recoiled with a gut-wrenching scream, and—

—Yvonne tumbled from the nothingness, falling to the floor in a steaming, seared heap.

“I came *looking* for you this time, Krueger!” Alice snapped, kneeling beside Yvonne and shaking her. When Yvonne’s eyes opened, Alice

hissed, *"Wake up!"*

Yvonne was gone in an instant.

"This is between you and me," Alice said threateningly.

"Why do you think I let *her* go?"

"I know why you want me here, Freddy. I know you need my baby. You're ready for your next turn in the wheel, aren't you?"

Some of the sick amusement left Freddy's face and his eyes narrowed. He was looking angrier by the moment.

"You want to come back into the real world and kill again … *don't you?* And you need my baby so you can come back here even *stronger.* The final turn of the wheel …"

Freddy's knives were clanging angrily beside him and he was beginning to snarl.

"Well, you're not coming back through *Jacob,* you son of a bitch!"

Freddy's face twisted into a hideous mask of hatred and he lunged for her. Alice dove aside, kicking up a leg to trip him. Her foot caught his ankle and Freddy plunged forward, flipping over the edge of the boiler-room walkway, but not before he reached out and grabbed her leg, pulling her over with him. Alice screamed as they fell, fighting to maintain her control.

Remember, she told herself, *you are your own dream master …*

Alice concentrated hard on Greta, mentally clinging to a vivid image of her friend, until—

—they hit the filthy concrete floor below and Alice broke from a smooth roll to stand on her feet. She smiled triumphantly when she saw that Freddy was trapped in an enormous high chair made of filthy rusted metal. He cried out, enraged, as he fought to free his arms from the metal tray that crossed his lap. He curled his arms under the tray and heaved, grunting with exertion, the muscle cords in his neck pressing tautly against his skin, until the tray began to make weak cracking sounds, and—

—Alice concentrated hard on Dan, drawing strength from his memory, power from his love, and she felt herself changing … transforming. She fell to her hands and knees, except they weren't hands and knees anymore. Her arms were above her head, stretched out on each side, like … *handlebars* … and her legs curled up tighter and tighter until they formed a perfectly round circle … a *wheel* … and another wheel grew from her chest, coming to rest on the concrete … and her engine *revved* …

As Freddy tore the tray away and stood up in the high chair, lifting the tray over his head to throw at Alice, she shot toward him in a streak of gleaming chrome, crashing through the high chair and

sending Freddy into the air, flailing helplessly like a rag doll.

Alice spun around and faced him when he landed, her engine growling like a wild beast. Freddy crouched, bracing himself for her as Alice shot forward again. At precisely the right moment Freddy jumped into the air, clambering onto Alice as she sped by. Feeling him clutching her handlebars and straddling her back, Alice began to concentrate again … this time on the asylum … on Freddy's one hundred lunatic fathers …

She headed straight for a concrete wall with a burst of speed, hitting it and crashing through the concrete easily, landing with a jerk on—

—the floor of the asylum. She squealed to a halt, fell into a roll and came out of it on her feet, herself once again, as—

—Freddy stood and glanced around at his surroundings with a look of frightened recognition on his face. Alice found the stairs that led to the door above and climbed them slowly, watching … waiting …

They oozed from the shadows, some of them wearing filthy hospital gowns, others only tatters or completely naked. Freddy spun around to flee, but they surrounded him, coming in from all sides, closing in more rapidly as Alice watched from above. Some of them laughed, others growled, and some just made low gurgling sounds as they reached out, and—

—Freddy looked up at Alice and screamed as they fell on him, pulling, ripping, hitting, clawing.

She heard the crack of his bones … the tearing of his flesh …

"Welcome home, Freddy," she breathed.

As the voices of the maniacs rose to an unbearable cacophony, Alice turned, walked up the stairs and stepped into the corridor, closing the heavy iron door behind her.

"Mommy … wanna meet my new friend?"

Alice turned with a gasp and saw Jacob standing in the corridor beside Freddy.

"You've learned a few tricks from me, Alice," Freddy said. "But you haven't learned them all …" He reached down and took Jacob's hand.

Alice started toward him, shouting, "You won't hurt him! You need us both!"

"I've *got* you both."

Alice stopped a few yards away and focused on Jacob. She held out her arms and called, "C'mon, Jacob … time to go home."

Freddy hunkered down and whispered in the boy's ear, "This *is* your home."

"Jacob, *listen* to me. I'm your *mother!"*

"But *I'm* your friend. And friends're more *fun!"*

Jacob seemed torn, looking from Alice to Freddy and back again. She beckoned him with both hands and called his name again. He finally broke away from Freddy and ran toward her, arms outstretched, but his feet skittered to a halt, and Alice's voice caught in her throat when—

—a man called out from behind Jacob: "Wait, Jacob!" The boy stopped and turned, and Alice looked over his shoulder. Dan was walking down the corridor toward Jacob, his smile warm and loving as he said, "Let's go to your mother." Jacob hesitated as Dan reached down and took his hand. "C'mon, Jacob."

Alice's heart ached as she watched Dan, wishing he could really be back, to stay … but she knew he wasn't …

"Jacob, that's not Dan!" Alice cried.

As she spoke, the Dan-thing reached for Jacob's face with his right hand and—

—Alice screamed, "I love you, Jacob!" and—

—Jacob tore away from the man and threw himself toward Alice as —

—razor-sharp claws sprang from the Dan-thing's fingers—from *Freddy's* fingers—and swiped the air inches from Jacob's face as the boy ran for his mother, and—

—Alice stood, her arms open, crying, "Hurry, Jacob, c'mon, Jacob, *come on!"*

Jacob dove for his mother and slid between her arms, slamming into her torso, and—

—they were engulfed in a sudden flash of soft glowing light as Jacob merged silently with his mother. Alice felt him pass into her body, and she sucked in a deep breath, opening her eyes and screaming as—

—Freddy leaped toward her, plunging through the aura of white light and passing into her like a knife, directly behind Jacob.

Alice fell to the floor, retching, and cried at the top of her lungs, *"AMANDAAAA!"*

After her cry finished echoing through the corridor, Alice heard a sound behind her and turned to see Amanda Krueger standing before a large door … the iron door that led to the room full of maniacs.

"You were his mother," Alice said, struggling to her feet. "It's time to take him back."

"He's an abomination," the nun hissed.

"You've *got* to …" Alice swayed with another pain, but this one did not stop. With her hands on her belly, she felt movement inside …

powerful, restless movement … she looked down to see her belly growing rapidly, expanding like a balloon being inflated … and all the while there was movement within. She staggered back against the wall and cried, “You’re caught in the circle with him! You’ve *got* to break it! *You’ve got to take him back!”*

Amanda stared at Alice’s growing belly for a long moment, then stepped forward with a resigned nod.

A spasm of pain knocked Alice to her knees; she looked up at Amanda pleadingly.

Amanda leaned forward, placed a gentle hand on Alice’s stomach and said in little more than a breath, “My son … I forgive you …”

Alice convulsed as something tore away inside her and a burst of dull light the color of sickness and death oozed from her abdomen, flashed, and shot directly into Amanda’s, making Amanda stumble backward.

Alice stood slowly, and there was a long silent pause between them, until—

—Amanda fell to her knees and clutched her face as her skin began to shift, to bubble like melted wax, and the skin on her hands began to shrivel and darken.

Alice rushed toward her to help, but Amanda cried, “No! Get away from me! Take your son and leave! *Save your son!”*

She paused, grimacing, as Amanda’s condition became worse … her nose narrowed and lengthened … her eyes became sinister glistening slits … Amanda began to resemble her own monstrous son …

Alice turned and dashed down the corridor, stopping a few hundred yards away when she heard a hellish scream from behind her. She turned to look at Amanda, but—

—doors were slamming all the way down the corridor, closing the passage off and separating her from the nun. She turned again and ran on down the corridor, murmuring, “We’re going home, Jacob …”

Chapter 11

Months later, as Alice lay in her hospital room holding her baby, her dad and Yvonne stood beside her bed, beaming.

"He's beautiful," Yvonne whispered.

Alice said, "Just like his dad." Smiling up at her father, she added, "And his grandpa."

Her dad stroked her cheek and said, "You done good, sweetheart. I'm proud of you. *And* of li'l Jacob Daniel, here. He's gonna be a fine boy … a fine young man. You just wait. We'll *see* to that."

Alice's smile faltered and she felt a lump in her throat as she whispered, "I just wish … everyone could be here. Dan … Greta … Mark." She shook her head slowly. "Thank God he's gone."

"Who?" her dad asked.

"You know who, Dad. We've talked about him before. *Freddy."*

Alice watched as her dad and Yvonne exchanged a troubled glance.

"I know," he said, leaning close. "You've told me about him, and I *believe* you. But he's gone now, like you said."

"So are my friends."

"I know, honey. And that's bad. But Freddy's gone, so from now on let's think of their deaths as accidents. Dan drove into a truck … Greta choked on a piece of fish … Mark's bed collapsed and crushed him at his drawing table … I think maybe it'll make it easier to live with. Okay?"

She nodded hesitantly, knowing he was right.

"So smile for me," he said.

Alice smiled as Jacob Daniel Johnson cooed in her arms …

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